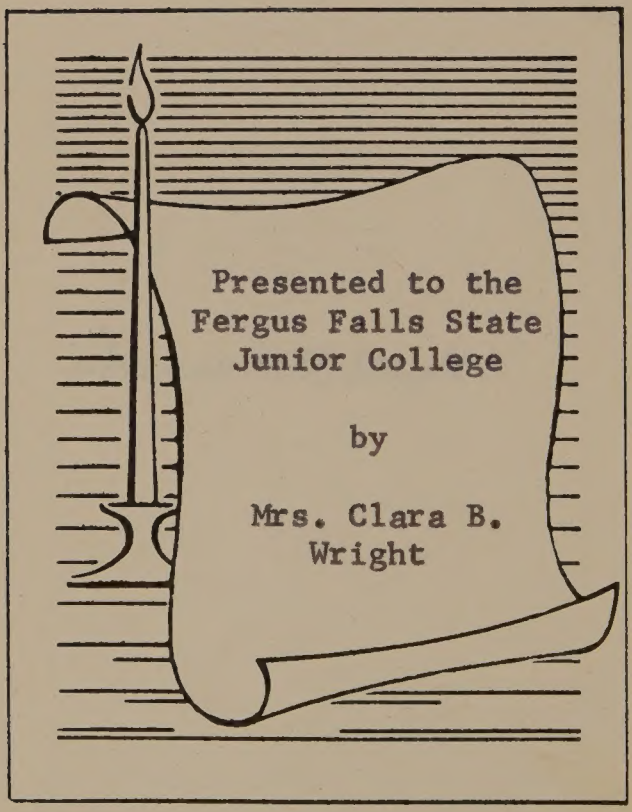
FERGUS FALLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
852.912 G429 E
Giacosa, Guisep - The stronger: Like falling leaves
3 0209 00027 4036


Presented to the
Fergus Falls State
Junior College
by
Mrs. Clara B.
Wright

THE MODERN DRAMA SERIES

EDITED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

THE STRONGER : LIKE FALLING LEAVES :
SACRED GROUND BY GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

THE STRONGER: LIKE FALLING LEAVES: SACRED GROUND

THREE PLAYS BY

GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

EDITH AND ALLAN UPDEGRAFF

NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXIII

COPYRIGHT, 1913, BY MITCHELL KENNERLEY
ALL DRAMATIC RIGHTS RESERVED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

THE·PLIMPTON·PRESS
NORWOOD·MASS·U·S·A

352.912
S429
E
Copy 1

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	vii
Chronological List of Plays	xv
The Stronger	1
Like Falling Leaves	149
Sacred Ground	287

INTRODUCTION

TWO figures stand out with recognized preëminence in modern Italian dramatic literature. They are Gabriele d'Annunzio and Giuseppe Giacosa. With this preëminence, however, the similarity between them ends. They are at such opposite extremes, indeed, that they serve as excellent foils one for the other. Both are popular, but for widely different reasons. D'Annunzio's name is a familiar one throughout Europe and America because his work is spectacular, sensational, and elaborately ornamented with poetic imagery, much of it most delicate and beautiful. Giacosa is beloved in Italy, and little known beyond it, because his plays are based upon humble, popular, easily understood themes, with real, everyday people as characters, and because, unlike most Italian plays, they show to best advantage when placed upon the stage. D'Annunzio's plays have few characters, uninvolved plots, and long speeches heavily loaded with ornamentation. Giacosa's prose plays — and it is by his prose plays that he should be judged — have many characters of many different types, several side issues apart from the main plot, and a simple, unornamented dialogue, whose simplicity, however, is that of careful art. It is swift, forceful, dramatic, spiced with keen observations upon life expressed with epigrammatic terseness and, when occasion demands, powerful and eloquent. It is com-

monly said of d'Annunzio that he understands only one type of character, the so-called "artistic temperament." It might be said with equal truth of Giacosa that he understood almost every type but this one. Giacosa could not compare with d'Annunzio as a poet. D'Annunzio cannot compare with Giacosa as a student of real life or as a dramatic technician.

It is upon these two qualities that Giacosa's reputation as a dramatist rests: his ability to understand and portray character, and his mastery of technique. In the first of these he was not much above many of his contemporaries, but in the second he outdistanced them so far that he came to stand absolutely alone. The art of writing a play that seems to act of itself is a rare one in Italy, so rare that Giacosa may safely be cited as the only modern Italian playwright who ever mastered it.

On account of his popular themes, his deceptively simple dialogue, his avoidance of tragic endings, his tendency to moralize, his more or less *bourgeois* attitude toward life and its problems, Giacosa has often been accused of being a cheap dramatist who made it his business to pander to the mean taste of the theatre-going public. No accusation could be more unjust to him, either as a man or as a playwright. Giacosa undoubtedly wrote plays that pleased. From "Una Partita a Scacchi" down to "Il più forte," all the first nights of his plays caused ovations that were rare even in demonstrative Italy. But Giacosa was beloved of the theatre-going public, not because he studied and pandered to their taste, but because their taste was his. He was one of them. He had their attitude toward life, their ideals, their prejudices, their inhibitions and

limitations. What he gave was the best he had to give, and he gave it in the most polished and effective form that the Italian drama has yet been able to achieve. It will be seen by the dates of his plays that they were produced at long intervals. These intervals meant slow, careful, painstaking, discriminating craftsmanship. Giacosa was above all an earnest and enthusiastic student of technique. He was gifted with a true and pure artistic sense. He worked slowly and with meticulous care, and his whole literary career was one of dignity.

In addition to his plays Giacosa wrote "Novelle Valdostane," 1886, a collection of stories. He also wrote many records and impressions of travel in the Alps and other parts of Europe, and "Impressions d'America," 1898, which was the result of a visit paid to this country. Furthermore, he produced, in collaboration with Luigi Illica, the libretti of three very well-known operas: "La Bohême," "Tosca," and "Madame Butterfly," the music in each case being by Puccini. He was also connected editorially with the newspaper "Il Corriere della Sera" and the magazine "La Lettura," both published at Milan.

Giacosa was born in Colleretto-Parella, Piedmont, on the 21st of October, 1847. Following in the footsteps of his father, who was a country lawyer and something of a literary man as well, he studied law and practised it for a few years, writing plays in his leisure hours until the success of his first serious attempt made him give up the law entirely. This first success was "Una Partita a Scacchi" (A Game of Chess), 1871, a sentimental idyl of youth and first love. It was followed by "Il Trionfo d'Amore" (The Triumph of Love),

1875, "Il Marito Amante della Moglie" (The Husband in Love with his Wife), 1877, and "Il Fratello d' Armi" (The Brother in Arms), also 1877. All of these plays were written in verse. All of them were sentimental melodramas with an irresistible appeal for youth, which sees life simply and through rose-colored mists.

From the sentimental and idyllic, Giacosa branched into the historical in "Il Conte Rosso," 1880. Close upon this followed "Luisa," in 1881, and "Il Filo" (The Thread), 1883, a puppet play. In 1888 appeared four short plays: "Resa a Discrezione" (Surrender at Discretion), "La Zampa del Gatto" (The Cat's Paw), "La Tardi Ravveduta" (The Belated Repentance), and "La Sirena" (The Siren).

In 1888 appeared also "Tristi Amori" (Sad Loves), one of Giacosa's most important plays and one which shows a distinct advance upon his earlier work. In this treatment of the perennial "triangle," Giacosa definitely becomes what he remains to the end of the chapter, a prose dramatist and a realist. "Tristi Amori" stands out from the great mass of similar plays by virtue of two things. One of them is the manner in which Giacosa makes the homely, middle-class setting form an effective foil for the tragic situation, and the other is his conception of the husband. To this simple, kindly, big-hearted, eminently lovable country lawyer everything even remotely appertaining to his wife is of necessity perfection. His whole-souled admiration and implicit confidence, shown even in the minutest details of his relations with her, give to his discovery of the crushing truth a heart-rending poignancy.

But in this play, where Giacosa showed his charac-

teristic strength, he also showed his characteristic weakness. The moralist in him would out. He insisted upon providing for the future of his characters in a manner that was, in a measure at least, satisfactory to himself and his audience. At the last moment the wife is unable to force herself to leave her child; and she and the disillusioned husband agree to remain together and make the welfare of that child their common aim in life. Here, as in many of his other plays, Giacosa ended by refusing to look the facts squarely in the face. He evolved a fine tragic situation, but he could not bear to follow it out to its logical, but too tragic, end. So he compromised and moralized and did much to spoil the effect of an otherwise powerful and well-wrought play.

Giacosa's next play was one of his few tragedies, "La Signora di Challant," produced in Italy in 1891. The following year Mme. Sarah Bernhardt included it in the repertoire which she brought to America and played in New York. This was the occasion of Giacosa's one visit to America. After "La Signora di Challant" followed the three plays contained in this volume — the last ones that Giacosa wrote: "Diritti dell' Anima" (Sacred Ground), 1894, "Come le Foglie" (Like Falling Leaves), 1900, and "Il più forte" (The Stronger), 1905.

In all his later works Giacosa showed clearly the influence of Ibsen; and in the psychological analysis of "Diritti dell' Anima" it is more apparent than in any other play. He has managed to give a new turn to the time-honored "triangle" plot by making the lover dead before the play opens and the wife faithful to her husband. Nor did he in this case give way to

his besetting sin of avoiding the logical ending. He faced it, with the result that he produced a final scene of real power. The most interesting and carefully drawn figure in the play is the weak, vacillating, smug, self-centred *Paolo*. It is characteristic of him that, after having driven his wife to her confession by his clumsy importunities, he first threatens to drive her out of the house, and then, in the next breath, pleads with her to remain because he can't get along without her.

" Come le Foglie " is generally considered to be Giacosa's masterpiece. The acclamation with which it was received on the 31st of January, 1900, passed beyond anything that the Italian stage had witnessed for many years. The play has frequently been declared too essentially Italian to make any appeal in a foreign country. Yet when a French translation was produced at Paris, in 1909, the sane and critical French audience quite lost its head and the French reviews vied with each other in heaping it with praise.

" Come le Foglie " came as a great, fresh, stimulating sweep of pure air to a public which was sick to nausea of the old stock characters, of the old long-winded stock speeches, and, above all, of the old threadbare theme of adultery. Here was a play full of vigor, freshness, actuality; a play based upon something more than personal intrigue; a play whose characters were real people of many different sorts, interacting upon each other in many different ways; a play eminently human, yet with a big, general significance back of its humanness.

It was long since the Italian public had been entertained by characters of such charm as the gay, witty,

handsome, utterly irresponsible and utterly lovable *Tommy;* of such appealing sweetness as the little serious-minded, capable *Nennele* — so gentle, yet when the occasion calls for it, so fiercely proud and spirited, so unafraid to speak her mind. We watch her all through the play with respect and admiration tempered by a little tolerant amusement at that extreme youth and that extreme lack of humor which make her take life and its responsibilities so seriously. Much of the interest and charm of the play is due to the juxtaposed characters of the sister and the brother.

All the characters in the play are so real and human that it seems impossible that they could be types as well. Yet types they are; and the whole situation is a typical one. A wealthy man, through what would be considered in the business world over-honesty, becomes bankrupt, and he and his family are forced to submit to the acid test of poverty. All the things that wealth formerly had smoothed over and covered up come to the surface. Traits hitherto unsuspected, such as selfishness and greed in *Giulia* and utter irresolution in *Tommy*, stand revealed in their sordid, petty, pitiable nakedness. The weak, like leaves driven by the wind, drift into the path of least resistance and follow the easiest way to their ultimate destruction.

In "Come le Foglie" Giacosa showed the business man who fails from over-honesty. In "Il più forte" he showed the business man who plays the game to win and who wins. This man, *Cesare*, is one of Giacosa's most successful creations. He seems such a real person that he gives the effect of being someone whom the reader became acquainted with yesterday or last week. "Il più forte" is not rated so high by the critics as

"Come le Foglie," yet much of it is undoubtedly more finished, much of it stronger, than anything in "Come le Foglie." The crisp, witty dialogue of the first act represents Giacosa at his best; and the simple, powerful eloquence of the last scene between *Silvio* and his father cannot be matched in "Come le Foglie." The play, too, will be found to be especially significant to American readers. The situation is one which is much more common and attracts much more attention in America than in Italy. Indeed, *Cesare* seems to an American reader not so much an Italian as an American financier.

Throughout all Giacosa's plays we sense one dominant note: an intense admiration for personal integrity, uprightness, and loyalty, tempered by a large charity for all human faults and foibles. This dominant note proceeds from Giacosa's own character. He possessed, from the accounts of all who knew him, the unbending uprightness, the charming amiability, the warm human kindliness which we find in so many of his creations. The success, financial and otherwise, which Giacosa enjoyed during his lifetime, was of the sort which turns heads. But Giacosa's head could not be turned. His was a nature which neither success nor failure could spoil. In the midst of his greatest fame he remained the same simple, kindly, modest, unassuming Italian gentleman that he had been when he began life as a plain country lawyer.

Giacosa died at the height of his dramatic success and fame on the 2d of September, 1906. All Italy mourned him, for he was not only admired but beloved.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PLAYS BY GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

A Game of Chess (Una Partita a Scacchi), 1871;

The Triumph of Love (Il Trionfo d' Amore), 1875;

The Husband in Love with His Wife (Il Marito Amente della Moglie), 1877;

The Brother in Arms (Il Fratello d' Armi), 1877;

Count Rosso (Il Conte Rosso), 1880;

Louise (Luisa), 1881;

The Thread (Il Filo), 1883;

Surrender at Discretion (Resa a Discrezione), 1888;

The Cat's Paw (La Zampa del Gatto), 1888;

The Belated Repentance (La Tardi Ravveduta), 1888;

The Siren (La Sirena), 1888;

Sad Loves (Tristi Amori), 1888;

The Lady of Challant (La Signora di Challant), 1891;

Sacred Ground (Diritti dell' Anima), 1894;

Like Falling Leaves (Come le Foglie), 1900;

The Stronger (Il più forte), 1905.

THE STRONGER

(Il Più Forte)

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

1905

PERSONS

Cesare Nalli, *sixty years old*

Elisa, *his wife, forty-eight years old*

Silvio, *their son, twenty-eight years old*

Flora, *Silvio's wife, twenty-five years old*

Edoardo Falcieri, *Cesare's nephew, twenty-nine years old*

Signor Nori, *Cesare's secretary*

Don Paolo

Signor Tallori, *a civil engineer*

General Ribordone

Countess Tomà

First Young Lady

Second Young Lady

Third Young Lady

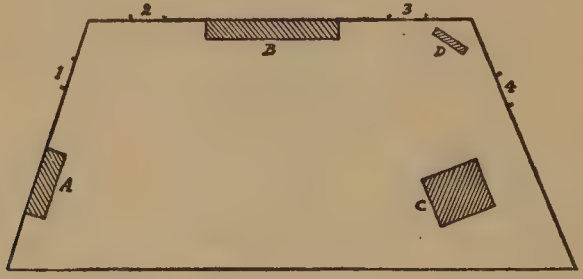
Fourth Young Lady

Five Young Gentlemen, *all very carefully shaved and dressed*

Ambrogio, *a servant*

Another Servant

The scene represents a drawing-room, not pretentious, but rich and elegant, which is used as a family sitting-room.



No. 1. A door leading to a little drawing-room furnished in yellow, and through that to the apartments of Silvio and Flora.

No. 2. A door leading to another drawing-room and then through other rooms to the entrance hall. It is the door connecting with the outside.

No. 3. A door leading into the dining-room.

No. 4. A door leading into the apartments of Cesare and Elisa.

A. A fireplace.

B. A pier table.

C. A large writing-desk.

D. A little portable card-table.

THE STRONGER

THE FIRST ACT

Cesare, Flora, Silvio, Elisa, and Edoardo have just finished dinner. Elisa wears a dark dress; Flora a light-colored one with a flowered pattern made in the latest fashion and cut V-shaped in front. Both are very elegant and aristocratic. The men are in dinner coats. Edoardo is very foppishly dressed and wears a gold chain that divides into two smaller chains, one for his watch, the other for a pencil or other trifle.

CESARE (*in good humor*)

Why, yes, I 've been thinking about it for a long time. I 'll shut up shop.

SILVIO

Hoorah!

CESARE

And I 'll go and live in Rome too. (*Putting his arm about Flora's waist*) My lovely daughter-in-law will initiate me into the joys of the intellect. Is that the way to say it?

FLORA

That 's the way to say it.

CESARE

And you know it won't be such a terrible job either. In spite of the fact that I am a successful money getter, I have quite a poetic soul.

FLORA

And besides, in intellectual things desire is as good as possession.

SILVIO (*to his mother*)

Note the pearls of wisdom dropping from her lips!

EDOARDO

And how about corporeal things, Flora?

FLORA

I don't trouble my head about them.

CESARE

Silvio will take me around to the artists' studios to see pictures and statues.

SILVIO

Oh no, father; I 'm in the business, so I should have to praise all of them. (*He has opened a box of cigars*) I 'm afraid there are none left of the kind you like. I don't see any but big, rich fellows: Imperiales, Flor de Cuba.

EDOARDO (*stretching out his hand*)

The kind I smoke.

SILVIO (*handing him an enormous cigar*)

There you are. (*To his father*) Oh yes, here 's one left. (*Hands it to him*) A modest Medianito.

CESARE

Thanks.

[*Silvio lights a match and hands it to his father. A servant has brought the coffee service and placed it on the pier table. Flora gets up to go and serve it. Edoardo follows her. He points out to her a little picture on the wall behind the pier table.*

EDOARDO

That 's the Greuze I was telling you about.

FLORA

Oh yes, I know it.

EDOARDO

Do you like it?

FLORA

Very much. It reminds me of one of Gluck's arias.

EDOARDO

Yes, it has such a frivolous little soul.

SILVIO (*handing a magazine to his mother*)

And here 's mother's opiate, — " The Modern Artist."

ELISA

Opiate! I read it conscientiously every evening.

SILVIO

It 's been coming for the last fortnight, and the leaves are not even cut.

ELISA

Because I looked over the table of contents and there was nothing about you, ungrateful boy.

CESARE (*with great complacency*)

He knows my favorite cigars and the habits of his mother.

SILVIO

I have been so little with you that I need to be observant when I have a chance.

ELISA

That 's so. First college in England, then the trip around the world, then painting in Rome — and getting married! If I had n't had the foresight to fall ill and bring you here to the Lake for these two autumn months, I should have seen nothing at all of you since you were twelve years old.

CESARE

Good wine matures best by travelling.

[*A servant brings to Cesare two telegrams on a tray upon which there is also a silver letter opener.*

CESARE (*whispers to the servant before opening the telegrams*) Well?

SERVANT

The custom-house was closed. It will be delivered tomorrow morning.

CESARE

Have you the bill of lading?

SERVANT (*handing it to him*)

Here it is.

CESARE

How about the little boxes?

SERVANT

They are on the mantle-shelf.

[*In the meantime Silvio has been looking fixedly at Flora and Edoardo. Cesare opens the telegrams, reads them and puts them back on the tray. The servant goes out. Cesare walks toward the mantle-shelf and manages unobserved to make sure of the presence of two jewel-cases there.*

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

What are you looking at?

SILVIO

I am watching my dear cousin Edoardo making himself agreeable to Flora.

ELISA (*lightly*)

He has good taste.

SILVIO

And he 's playing a fast game.

ELISA

You think —?

SILVIO

Look — he has noticed that we 're talking about him.

EDOARDO (*approaching, to Silvio*)

Your wife is a great admirer of Greuze.

SILVIO

So am I.

EDOARDO

And yet your style is the very opposite of his. You 're strong and bold. I saw your famous portrait of Miss Cline at Paris last year. Those deep amber hues in the background are very striking.

SILVIO

You 'll have to excuse me — I just paint. I 'm no critic.

FLORA (*passing by them on her way to serve coffee to Cesare and Elisa*) Won't you have any, mother?

ELISA

I never drink any in the evening.

CESARE (*to Flora, who hands him his cup*)

Thanks; put it down here. (*He indicates the mantle-shelf; Flora obeys and is about to return to the pier table*) Just a moment. What 's your hurry?

FLORA

I want to give the rest their coffee.

CESARE

They can wait.

EDOARDO

We can wait on ourselves. (*Serves himself coffee*)

CESARE (*takes the two jewel-cases from the mantle-shelf and offers one of them to Flora*) This is for you.

FLORA (*surprised and pleased*)

But why — ?

CESARE (*handing the other to Elisa*)

And this is for my esteemed consort.

FLORA (*who has opened her box*)

Oh wonderful! That 's from Tiffany!

ELISA (*to Cesare*)

Why?

CESARE

Because I 'm sixty years old today.

ELISA

That 's turning things upside down. We ought to give *you* presents.

CESARE

You give me a present when you accept one. (*To Flora*) Did I say it well?

FLORA

Wonderfully well! And what shall I say?

CESARE

Give me a kiss here. (*He offers his cheek and Flora kisses it*) And another here. (*He offers the other cheek; Flora kisses it also*) And then you 'll tell me that you 're not sorry that you left Rome to pass the winter with us two poor old folks. . . .

FLORA

On the contrary, I 'm very glad.

EDOARDO

And to reveal yourself at last to your relatives.

FLORA (*to Edoardo*)

I hope the relatives are pleased. (*To Elisa*) Let us see yours, mother. (*Elisa shows her the present which she has received*) A ring. A sapphire. What a big one! Why, it 's the firmament itself! But just look at my buckle! See, Silvio, what pure beauty!

It looks as if it had come from the cloak of a Pharaoh. It 's by Tiffany; I knew at once.

SILVIO

So did I; the name is printed on the box.

EDOARDO

Let me see.

FLORA

It 's a live jewel! There 's a drunken spirit of beauty in it. Is n't there? Is n't there? Can't you see it laugh?

SILVIO

A good-natured drunk!

CESARE (*takes from his pocket a sealed envelope and waves it in the air*) Here, Edoardo, catch! (*He throws it to Edoardo*)

EDOARDO (*catching it*)

Something for me too?

CESARE

Something for me too? You 're surprised? At dinner you did nothing but plague me for money like a beggar.

EDOARDO

Oh, that was to flatter you. (*He is about to open the envelope*)

CESARE

Don't open it.

EDOARDO

Why?

CESARE

So it won't be seen. You can burn it at your convenience.

EDOARDO

Oh! (*He steps aside, opens the envelope and takes*

from it a number of receipted bills, of which he takes careful account)

CESARE

Is it all right?

EDOARDO (*disappointed*)

Oh, very much so! You give me back my own! (*He tears the bills in half, puts them back into the envelope and thrusts the envelope into his pocket*)

ELISA

What is it?

EDOARDO

Water that 's gone over the mill-wheel, aunt.

ELISA

It seems still to be grinding you.

CESARE (*handing a paper to Silvio*)

And this you 'll get tomorrow. It 's in the custom-house.

SILVIO (*reads it, beaming*)

A Mercedes car!

FLORA (*joyously*)

Oh!

SILVIO (*putting his arm about Cesare's neck*)

Father! I 'll be the ruin of you yet!

CESARE

That 's what I want you to be. Do you like your present?

SILVIO

Do I like it!

CESARE

You might take me with you sometimes when you make a run into the country — if you will?

SILVIO

If I will! The idea!

ELISA

Oh, Silvio! A Mercedes!

CESARE

Forty horse-power.

ELISA

But they 're so dangerous.

SILVIO

Don't be afraid, mother dear.

FLORA

It 's a heroic machine. And heroes are always generous.

ELISA

Even that other one went too fast.

FLORA

Oh, it 's old and has rheumatism in the joints!

EDOARDO (*to Silvio*)

This will surely decide you to get rid of that snail of a chauffeur.

CESARE

Not if I know of it. I 'll take back my present first.

SILVIO

Don't worry. He 's a good, steady fellow.

FLORA

Very steady indeed — he never moves.

EDOARDO

Think of having wings and not flying!

CESARE

You anarchist, you ought to detest the automobile.

EDOARDO

Why? The automobile is the anarchistic machine *par excellence.* It brooks neither restraint nor law.

SILVIO

Like yourself.

EDOARDO

Like any man who thinks for himself.

FLORA

Are you really an anarchist?

EDOARDO

You 've known me for two months, and yet you ask such a question!

[*The servant returns with another telegram and hands it to Cesare, who reads it.*

FLORA

Silvio told me you were. I 've heard it said about the house too — and in society —

EDOARDO

But you don't believe it.

CESARE (*to the servant*)

Go and find out if Nori is in the house.

SERVANT

He came in half an hour ago. There were some telegrams for him, too.

CESARE

Ask him to come here a moment.

[*The Servant goes out.*

FLORA (*to Edoardo*)

An anarchist, an incendiary, a dynamiter?

EDOARDO

If it should become necessary.

FLORA

It used to be the dream of my life when I was a young girl to marry an anarchist. It 's lucky that I did n't meet you before Silvio.

EDOARDO

Why lucky?

FLORA

Oh, for a thousand reasons.

EDOARDO

Let 's hear one of the thousand.

FLORA

Well — you are not rich.

SILVIO

Thanks!

FLORA

I married you because you 're an artist and because I loved you.

EDOARDO

With regard to riches, I 'm entirely of your opinion, Flora.

SILVIO

It certainly was n't your fault that you did n't come by a big inheritance.

EDOARDO

Nor would it be yours if I did.

SILVIO

Of course not. But it 's no credit to me to have my father's money. Whereas, if you should strike it rich, it would be your own doing.

EDOARDO

I don't quite understand.

SILVIO

And you went a long way to look for it.

EDOARDO (*understanding*)

Oh!

CESARE

Are you carrying on speculations without my knowledge?

EDOARDO (*to Silvio*)

Go ahead and tell.

SILVIO

But —

EDOARDO

Go on, go on. I don't mind. Go ahead.

SILVIO

Are you reading, mother?

EDOARDO

Oh, go on — now that you 've begun. No doubt Flora has heard about it already.

FLORA

I don't know anything at all.

EDOARDO

Stop and think a moment whether Silvio did n't tell you —

SILVIO

The secret did n't belong to me — and besides, it was n't exactly savory.

EDOARDO

Very well, I 'll tell the story myself, and then we 'll see if your information was correct.

SILVIO

I had it from a relative of the person —

EDOARDO

Ah, to be sure — who lives in Rome. Correct me, please, if I make any mistakes. (*To Cesare*) You know that last summer Labieni invited me to go hunting with him in the Carpathian Mountains. Near his estate there is a gold mine for which the

Gold Company of Alaska offered — in vain — two hundred million *lire*.

CESARE

The Raplitz mine.

EDOARDO

No one knows better than you where gold may be found.

CESARE

Nor than you where it may be spent. Go on.

EDOARDO

The mine belongs to a certain Marchioness di Raplitz, a spinster, who inherited it from her father.

SILVIO

When she was twenty-five years old.

EDOARDO

And who has managed it amazingly well.

SILVIO

For the last twenty years.

EDOARDO

Exactly. For the last twenty years.

FLORA

Total: forty-five.

ELISA

Almost my age.

CESARE

And you say she 's a spinster?

SILVIO

I must add in her excuse that she is afflicted with a slight dorsal deformity.

EDOARDO

Oh, it 's quite visible, it 's quite visible.

SILVIO

I 've never seen her myself — but you ought to know.

EDOARDO

Labieni introduced me to her and both of us stayed a month as guests in the Raplitz mansion. The Marchioness is a lady of great culture and extraordinary intelligence.

SILVIO

But unfortunately anarchists do not haunt her virgin dreams as they did those of my wife.

EDOARDO

You 're wrong there! She asked nothing better. Don't put my modesty to blush. If it had n't been for a cousin who calls her "aunt" out of patrimonial tenderness —

SILVIO

The cousin is an extremely rich artist who does n't give a hang for money and who will cheerfully die of consumption inside of a few months.

FLORA

Lecozcky? Is she Lecozcky's aunt? I saw her portrait. Oh, Edoardo, you 're a wonder!

EDOARDO

Certainly I am. If the lady had also been young and beautiful — that is, if she had possessed rather more than she does possess — then you would all have applauded me.

SILVIO

Because it might be believed —

EDOARDO

It might be believed! And that 's enough for you. But nobody would have believed. The fact is that if she had been young and beautiful and I had married her for love, the world would have had one more thing to laugh about. Nothing more. And it has

too many already. Of course in this case there was no possible room for doubt. Her age and physical deformity removed even the suspicion of love's being put to the base use of a pretext. As it was, it could be nothing but the alliance of two brains and two energies for the purpose of directing a great instrument of power which is both better and more worth while than a nice little sentimental romance. What has idyllic love to do with such wealth? To possess it and do nothing but admire the moon at Giulietta's side would be to defraud the world.

SILVIO (*disgusted*)

Ugh! When a thing is despicable you can always throw a glamour over it by theorizing about it!

FLORA

Precisely!

SILVIO

What would you have given to the world?

EDOARDO

I would have shown it a master.

CESARE

That 's a good thing to say after you 've succeeded, my boy. You ought to marry her. In business everything that succeeds is right.

SILVIO (*patting his father's shoulder*)

Only honorable men can dare to hold that opinion.

EDOARDO

So, Flora, I suppose you despise me. I ask because you seemed to be a modern spirit. Do you despise me?

FLORA

I don't know.

EDOARDO

You only said what you did to please your husband.

SILVIO

Not to please him — to agree with him.

ELISA (*remonstratingly*)

Silvio!

FLORA

You defend yourself well, I admit. In your talk there is a bold spirit of sophistry that is very alluring. Sophistry is much more attractive than truth.

SILVIO (*disdainfully*)

Oh, those intellectual women!

FLORA

Don't you like intellectual women?

SILVIO

No, no! I like natural women.

EDOARDO

Vegetables!

SILVIO

You would like them to belong to the mineral kingdom. But you did n't quite manage it.

EDOARDO

Very neatly expressed. I 'll find occasion to repeat that somewhere.

CESARE (*to Flora*)

Flora, you owe me a lesson in ping-pong.

EDOARDO

And you owe *me* a revenge.

FLORA

If there 's time before the company gets here.

SILVIO

Is there going to be a reception?

ELISA

A few friends are coming to congratulate father.

SILVIO

They 're too kind! I 'm glad I have to go out.

ELISA

Oh!

SILVIO

I 'm waiting for my friend, Don Paolo, to go to the club.

FLORA

What will happen next?

SILVIO

I admit I 'm not in the habit of going. But this evening they 're to vote on a new member — and Don Paolo asked me to be sure not to stay away.

EDOARDO

Yes, so you could vote him down.

SILVIO

And he 's to come and call for me.

EDOARDO (*to Flora*)

Well then, just one game.

FLORA

First, I want to put this buckle on my belt.

EDOARDO

That 's soon done.

FLORA (*who has taken off her belt*)

I 'll have to rip off this other one.

EDOARDO (*takes a pair of scissors from his watch-chain and hands them to her*) If these will be of any use to you —

FLORA

And then I 'll have to put on the new one.

EDOARDO

You 'll need a pin.

FLORA

Let 's see. (*Sits down and rips*)

[*Signor Nori enters.*

CESARE (*seeing him*)

Oh, there you are! Come this way. (*He leads him to the right of the stage toward the writing-desk and hands him one of the telegrams*) Read this telegram. Did *you* get any?

NORI

Yes, sir; two long, urgent telegrams in cipher, one after the other. — From Isidoro Lamias.

CESARE

Of course. Let me see them. Did you decipher them?

NORI

The first — the longest one. But I did n't want to keep you waiting.

CESARE

Have you brought the key?

NORI

Here it is.

[*Both begin to decipher. Flora has in the meantime taken off the old buckle and put the new one in its place.*

EDOARDO

So. Now we need a pin with a catch to fasten it.

FLORA

And I have n't got one.

EDOARDO

How about the one with the little pearl that you

have at your neck. You women have always got one more pin than you need.

FLORA

What a lot of things you know!

EDOARDO

Shall I take it off for you?

SILVIO (*quickly*)

No. Excuse me; I 'll do that.

EDOARDO

Behold the master!

[*Silvio makes haste to take the pin from the back of Flora's collar.*

FLORA

Be careful! Gently, please!

SILVIO (*handing her the pin*)

Did I scratch you?

FLORA (*looking at him mischievously*)

Would you like to?

SILVIO (*bending toward her, in a low and ardent voice*)

I would like to do worse. Go and play your game. Go on. (*He walks over to the fire and stands with his back to it*)

FLORA (*has put on the belt again*)

There, it 's all done. (*To Silvio*) Won't you look and see if it 's becoming?

EDOARDO

Wonderfully so!

FLORA

I did n't ask you. Come along, father.

CESARE

Give Edoardo his revenge first.

EDOARDO

Uncle, remind me later that I 've something to say to you.

[*Flora goes into the little drawing-room, which contains the ping-pong table. Edoardo follows her. The two may be seen playing.*

CESARE (*having finished deciphering the telegrams, he rises and goes toward the front of the stage with Nori*) Nothing but talk, you know. He won't kill himself. He has threatened that before. Every so often he drags suicide into his business affairs. You go on and sell.

NORI

But you must remember that old Lamias really did kill himself.

CESARE

Oh well, if suicide runs in the family, what have I to do with it? Sell, sell.

NORI

Today, when you were out, Fausto Lamias came into the office — the son, the one who lives here in Milan. He was frantic. I had to lock all the doors. He shrieked that it would ruin his father, that it 's the act of a traitor, that it will cause a scandal, that you had agreed to buy.

CESARE

That 's mere talk. In business we have nothing to do with pity or threats. How many are there left in the portfolio?

NORI

Six hundred.

CESARE

Sell. I 'm not the guardian of the House of Lamias.

You can tell that Bianchi fool that, as a final blow, I 'll throw them all on the market tomorrow.

NORI

But — allow me —

CESARE (*with authority*)

Have you any other business?

NORI

No.

CESARE (*passing into the middle of the stage*)

Won't you have a cup of coffee — a cigar?

NORI

No, thanks.

CESARE

Have you heard how your sister is?

NORI

Yes, sir. My brother-in-law wrote me that she is recovering now. But she 's still very weak.

CESARE

Tell Battista to send her two dozen bottles of '92 Bordeaux. It 's a strengthening wine.

NORI

Oh, thank you!

CESARE

Remember, '92. Tell him at once so that he can get it off in the morning. Good night.

NORI

Good night. (*He goes out*)

SILVIO (*looking tenderly at his father*) You 're a regular dispenser of bounties!

CESARE

Why, it 's a great pleasure when one is able to do it. (*Goes toward the ping-pong table in the little*

drawing-room) It 's my turn now. Have you people finished?

FLORA (*laughing merrily*)

Game! It 's over.

EDOARDO

And I 'm beaten. Come on, come on.

[*Cesare goes into the little drawing-room.*

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

Don't you think you were a little too bitter to Edoardo?

SILVIO

I can't bear him. He 's a stupid, brutal bull. And I can't understand how a man like father, so upright and simple-hearted, can keep him around, right under his feet all the time.

ELISA

He 's the son of your father's sister who died young. He has no other relatives.

SILVIO

I suppose I 'm wrong.

CESARE (*from the little drawing-room*)

Oh, what a stroke!

[*A ping-pong ball rolls from the little drawing-room onto the middle of the stage. Flora and Edoardo run after it laughing.*

FLORA

It 's mine! It 's mine! It 's mine!

EDOARDO (*picking it up*)

Here it is. (*Calls laughingly toward the little drawing-room*) Advantage, uncle! (*Carries the ball back into the little drawing-room*)

FLORA (*to Silvio*)

Don't you want to play?

SILVIO

No, thanks, I 'll stay here with mother.

FLORA

A serious discussion?

ELISA

Oh, we 're just gossiping.

FLORA

My respects. (*Makes a curtsey and goes into the little drawing-room*)

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

At dinner Edoardo was talking about a lecture that is to be given tomorrow at the Art Club.

SILVIO

Yes. A lecture by that fellow Tito Osco, a fakir, on the Æsthetics of Race.

ELISA

And he asked Flora to go with him.

SILVIO

Of course. And Flora accepted.

ELISA

Do you mind?

SILVIO

I don't like the idea of Flora's being seen alone in Edoardo's company.

ELISA

Alone! At a lecture?

SILVIO

I don't like it. But I shall not say anything about it.

ELISA

You might go, too.

SILVIO

Oh no. It would look as if I were spying on them.

ELISA

Would you like me to go?

SILVIO

You? Would you go?

[*A servant enters the little drawing-room and speaks in a low voice to Flora.*

ELISA

Not that I care for it, you know. I don't understand anything about such things.

SILVIO

You're not an intellectual.

ELISA

No, I'm afraid not.

FLORA (*from the little drawing-room, to the servant*)

I'll go. (*She passes the racquet to Edoardo*) Edoardo, you finish the game with daddy. And hurry, because we have to take away the table. (*Comes forward on the stage*) Mother, the General and his daughters are here.

ELISA

Why don't they come in?

FLORA

They're waiting for the Countess in order to make a ceremonious entrance. But you stay here. I don't want to break in on any confidences. I'll go. (*She goes out through the main door*)

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

It's understood, then. I'll go with them. I'll tell Edoardo now.

SILVIO

Oh, if you tell him, you won't have to suffer the boredom of going. Flora will doubtless be pleased

at your offer, but Edoardo will find some way to drop the whole thing.

ELISA

You think so?

SILVIO

He 's been scheming for a chance to be alone with Flora. If he misses his chance, he won't get any more pleasure than you out of the Æsthetics of Race.

[*A servant enters from the dining-room and begins silently to prepare a service of champagne and cakes on the pier table. Another servant goes into the ping-pong room to take away the table.*

CESARE (*from the drawing-room*)

Hello, they 're going to drive us out.

EDOARDO

Well, then you and I can have a little talk. (*He takes Cesare's arm and leads him toward the writing-desk; in a low voice*) There 'll be something for me, too, will there?

CESARE

Something of what?

EDOARDO

Of the profits. You made a big killing today. I saw my friend, Lamias.

[*Don Paolo enters through the main door.*

CESARE

Good evening, Don Paolo.

DON PAOLO

Good evening, and congratulations!

CESARE

Thanks.

EDOARDO (*to Cesare, after having bowed to Don Paolo*)
Come over here so that you can't get away from me. (*He leads him toward the writing-desk and talks to him in a low voice, laughing from time to time*)

DON PAOLO (*to Elisa*)
I know it already! I know it already! Dear lady, you must show me a hand and a ring.

ELISA (*handing him the box*)
Only the ring, because I have n't put it on yet.

DON PAOLO
I beg you to put it on. Jewels in their caskets are dead.

ELISA (*puts on the ring and holds out her hand*)
Anything to please you.

DON PAOLO (*kissing her hand*)
And now I can't see the ring at all! (*To Silvio*) Pretty poor! Pretty poor! And I prepared it too. I did nothing but rehearse it all the way here.

SILVIO
But it 's such a short way here.

ELISA
Who is out there?

DON PAOLO
Out there — (*to Silvio*) Why, there is your wife doing the honors of the house to General Ribordone, to his bevy of young ladies, and to their never-failing train of fledglings. Be careful with them, for they 're all smooth and sticky like newly bathed babies. Then there 's a monstrous mass of flowers between the martial knees of the General. And they 're all waiting for the angelic Countess Tomà to advance in a body and present that monstrous

mass to the head of the house, who has completed his sixtieth year. I can't understand what flowers have got to do with that age, but they must be some kind of symbol. I do understand, however, that the party is a surprise, for I see a battery of champagne over there.

ELISA

Well, if you 've finished, I 'll go and receive them. (*She goes out through the little drawing-room*)

SILVIO

We can slip out through the dining-room and nobody will see us.

DON PAOLO

It 's so comfortable here.

SILVIO

But are we not going to the club?

DON PAOLO (*as if he had forgotten it*)

Ah! (*Intimating that he does n't intend to go*) Oh!

SILVIO

Are they not going to vote this evening?

DON PAOLO

Yes — but —

SILVIO

You were ready to turn the universe upside down to keep that scoundrel from being received among decent people.

DON PAOLO

Oh, come now, don't exaggerate!

SILVIO

You were afraid that I might forget to go. You were so anxious about it that nothing would satisfy you short of coming for me in person.

DON PAOLO

The voting must be closed by this time.

SILVIO

No, no, it does not close until midnight. Stay here if you want to; I 'm going.

DON PAOLO (*quickly*)

No.

SILVIO

What do you mean, anyway? You act as if you were hiding something.

DON PAOLO

Not at all! But on second thought, it has seemed to me that before offering a man such an affront one should have positive proof that he deserves it.

SILVIO

Why, this very day you were telling me about Falba's various atrocities!

DON PAOLO

I was repeating rumors — caught on the wing.

SILVIO (*calling his father*)

Father.

DON PAOLO

No, don't do that. We need to —

CESARE

Did you call me?

SILVIO

Just a moment. Falba is trying to get into the club.

CESARE

So I understand.

SILVIO

What do you think of it?

CESARE

Oh, I don't know anything about such things. But I would n't receive him into my own house.

SILVIO (*to Don Paolo*)

There, you see!

EDOARDO

Why, what 's up? I thought Don Paolo was among those bent upon keeping him out.

DON PAOLO (*to Edoardo*)

But you 're for him.

EDOARDO

I am.

SILVIO

Of course you are. (*To Cesare*) What sort of a man is Falba?

CESARE

He 's an old beast who has daughters old enough to be married and who carries on with ballet dancers.

EDOARDO

And you want to blackball him for that! At that rate you 'd soon exterminate the whole club!

SILVIO

It is n't for that.

CESARE

Well, what is it for, then?

SILVIO

It 's because of his dishonest business dealings.

CESARE

Um!

SILVIO

He has made millions in the building disasters of Rome and Naples.

CESARE

Quite true. Whenever money is lost there 's always someone who wins it. And then everybody is down on him.

SILVIO

And why should n't they be down on a rascal?

CESARE

What do outsiders know about business?

SILVIO

They know all that 's necessary. If you, for instance, were to be nominated at the club, I don't think there would be a single black ball.

DON PAOLO (*uneasily*)

But what 's the use of all this talk?

CESARE

I would n't hear of such a thing. I go to bed at ten. But if, by any possibility, I should be nominated — um — !

SILVIO (*laughing*)

Ha, ha, ha!

CESARE

What are you laughing about? They 'd blackball me.

SILVIO

You? You?

DON PAOLO (*uneasily*)

Don't let 's get away from the subject.

ELISA (*entering from the small drawing-room, which is full of people*) Cesare, come here a moment and see what 's going on.

DON PAOLO (*quickly*)

I think your wife is calling you.

CESARE (*going toward the small drawing-room*)

Here I am. (*He goes into the drawing-room; voices of many persons are heard*) Oh! How kind you are, Countess! My dear General!

EDOARDO (*looking at Don Paolo and Silvio; aside*)

What the deuce is in the air anyway?

DON PAOLO (*to Silvio*)

As a special favor to me — don't go.

SILVIO

We 'll see. (*He goes to receive the guests*)

[*Elisa and Cesare enter, followed by Flora, the Countess Tomà, and General Ribordone with his four daughters and their five young men, all of whom are smooth-shaven, scented, faultlessly dressed, extremely elegant and circumspect. The young ladies flock around Elisa, all of them talking at once.*

THE YOUNG LADIES

Yes, yes, Signora, be kind to us. Just one dance, two dances. That 's all we ask for.

ELISA

But the big drawing-room is n't ready for dancing, girls. It has n't been open all winter — not since my illness.

FIRST YOUNG LADY

In the yellow drawing-room. There 's a piano there.

ELISA

But it 's so small.

SECOND YOUNG LADY

But there are only a few of us.

THIRD YOUNG LADY

And we can go in line.

GENERAL

Signora, allow me to interpose the authority of my white hairs. But I commit myself for only one dance. These giddy girls have been dancing three nights in succession. I could fall asleep standing up.

ELISA (*complying*)

Flora!

FLORA

Yes, mother, I think so, too.

[*The young ladies are jubilant; the young men remain serious; Flora goes into the yellow drawing-room.*

THE YOUNG LADIES (*consulting together with a great deal of chattering*) Don Paolo! Don Paolo 's here! (*They surround Don Paolo*) Don Paolo will play for us.

DON PAOLO

No, no, no!

THE YOUNG LADIES

Oh, be a good fellow, Don Paolo!

DON PAOLO

But I don't know anything but slow music.

FIRST YOUNG LADY

That 's all right — gavottes and minuets will do. Come now.

DON PAOLO (*pointing to one of the young men*)

All right, but let Riccardo begin. And I 'll play later on.

THE YOUNG LADIES

Riccardo! A waltz!

[*The whole mass of them pass out like a whirlwind.*

ELISA

General, won't you have a glass of champagne?

GENERAL

With pleasure. And then a game of écarté with your husband.

CESARE

I 'm ready.

ELISA

Silvio, will you bring over that little table?

SILVIO

It 's done. (*He brings the little card-table to the middle of the stage, under the light, and arranges it for the game*)

CESARE (*leading the Countess to a seat near the fire*)

This is one of the privileges of age. Beauty offers me flowers.

COUNTESS

Flowers for the strong.

GENERAL (*seeing Edoardo*)

Hello there!

EDOARDO

Glad to see you, my dear General. (*They shake hands; waltz music is heard*)

GENERAL

Do you know that Captain Paletta yesterday touched the fencing master of his regiment six times in succession with that famous thrust of yours?

EDOARDO

Yes, it 's impossible to parry it if you don't know it.

GENERAL

And who taught it to you?

CESARE

He says he invented it himself.

GENERAL

I 'm not surprised. When I was a colonel I had him

as a volunteer in my regiment. Bad morals, but a good sword.

CESARE

A good sort.

GENERAL

Did I say sort?

CESARE

No, no. I said it. I said a good sort.

GENERAL

Oh, to be sure. I was asleep. Where 's that champagne I was promised?

ELISA

Here it is.

EDOARDO (*carrying a glass of champagne to the Countess*) Will you have some champagne, Countess?

COUNTESS

No, thanks. But I wish you would call Don Paolo here a moment. (*Edoardo turns about to call him*) No, not that way. I could have called him myself by raising my voice.

EDOARDO

Exactly. (*Goes to the pier table and puts down the glass; then he goes up to Don Paolo*)

GENERAL (*to Elisa*)

Will you do me the honor of being my partner?

[*Cesare, the General and Elisa sit down to the game.*

ELISA

I 'll shuffle for you.

EDOARDO (*leading Don Paolo to the Countess*)

Here is the happy mortal —

COUNTESS (*to Don Paolo*)

Who did n't even notice that I was here?

DON PAOLO

I was looking at you.

COUNTESS

From a safe distance! I want to talk to you.

EDOARDO

In confidence?

COUNTESS

He does n't deserve it — but — in confidence.

DON PAOLO (*to Edoardo*)

Did you hear that?

EDOARDO

I envy and submit. But you need n't put on any airs, though. The Countess is a stock-broker in disguise. She knows the market-reports by heart.

COUNTESS

Quite so. I read them every morning and have them explained to me by my husband, who is ruining himself with bulls and bears.

DON PAOLO

It 's an exciting page.

COUNTESS

It is indeed. It 's like a very clear lake — when you peer into it you can make out wreckage and corpses at the bottom.

EDOARDO

How romantic you are!

DON PAOLO

The only field of battle left in Europe now is the stock exchange.

EDOARDO

Or business in general.

COUNTESS

Yes, that too. But the silent battles of the stock exchange have a more striking and tragic beauty.

EDOARDO

Is it right, I ask, when there are two blue eyes like that — ! What account can you give of your useless beauty?

COUNTESS

Beauty is good for nothing but to make trouble.

DON PAOLO

Or rumors of trouble.

EDOARDO

And about yours — I understand that there are some rumors.

COUNTESS

Oh yes. They 've already given me a dozen lovers.

EDOARDO

Myself among the number.

COUNTESS

You?

EDOARDO

So they say. — But I have not believed it.

COUNTESS

Neither have I. — And now run away and play. (*Edoardo bows and withdraws*) And learn from your uncle if you want to recoup your fortunes.

EDOARDO (*turning around*)

In what way?

COUNTESS

Why, they say that last night *Macao* got the better of you.

EDOARDO

Talk!

COUNTESS

They say so. — And I believed it.

EDOARDO

So did I. (*He goes toward the card-table*)

COUNTESS (*softly to Don Paolo*)

He lost sixty thousand *lire.*

DON PAOLO

He has n't got it, so what 's the difference?

EDOARDO (*at the card-table*)

How is it going, uncle?

CESARE

Ah, the king! You bring me good luck.

EDOARDO

I 'd like to know where I get it from.

COUNTESS (*to Don Paolo*)

Come here. (*She gets up and walks nearer to the fireplace; Don Paolo follows her; they remain standing*) Do you know what 's going on?

DON PAOLO

I? No.

COUNTESS

Yes, dear boy, you know. You dined at the club, where they are talking of nothing else. The Lamias family is ruined.

DON PAOLO

Poor Fausto!

COUNTESS

Yes, it 's a great pity. But I don't trouble much about the vanquished. I cultivate the victors. To look at the master of the house over there, who would think that he had sowed every step of his path with ruin? He 's an Achilles.

DON PAOLO

Look out for his heel.

COUNTESS

Yes, even he must have a vulnerable point. — Silvio seems to me rather a poor sort of a man.

DON PAOLO

He is a great artist — absolutely upright and ready to believe that everybody else is the same.

COUNTESS

Then he is what I said he seemed to be. You ought to take him to the club this evening.

[*Dancing couples issue occasionally from both drawing-rooms.*

DON PAOLO

Hush!

FIRST YOUNG MAN (*to his partner in passing*)

Just listen how beautiful it is: "At these words Dio Votan raises his lance —" (*They go out again*)

COUNTESS

Remember that Fausto Lamias is expecting him.

SECOND YOUNG LADY (*to her partner in passing*)

The Count of Torino wears them six inches high. (*They disappear*)

COUNTESS

Fausto Lamias intends to insult him. My cousin Momi was told so by a friend.

[*The music ceases.*

DON PAOLO

I hope to keep Silvio from going.

FLORA (*coming from the drawing-room*)

Don Paolo, they 're calling you to play for them.

DON PAOLO

Here I am. (*To the Countess*) I 've already spoken

to him about it; and in any case he won't go without me. Excuse me, Countess, and thank you. (*He goes out*)

EDOARDO (*to the General while Cesare is playing a card*) Spades again.

GENERAL

And the trick 's mine.

CESARE (*playing his card*)

And spades again!

GENERAL (*to Elisa*)

He has his hands full. What can one do against such luck? (*He gets up and goes toward Flora, who has been talking with the Countess*) Have they finished?

FLORA

The first dance, General. They want another.

[*Music is heard from the drawing-room.*

GENERAL

Three nights! I 've been on duty as an escort three nights in succession. This evening we have a little rest. But the day after tomorrow it begins again. And tomorrow afternoon I have to take them to a lecture — the Æsthetics of Race.

EDOARDO

Oh, by the way, Flora, will you go with me? I 'll come for you.

ELISA (*quickly*)

Are n't you going to ask me?

[*Flora looks at her in surprise, then looks at Silvio.*

EDOARDO

You?

CESARE (*astonished*)

My wife at a lecture!

EDOARDO (*to Cesare*)
She 's trying to make sport of me.
SILVIO (*softly to Elisa*)
There you are, he 's clearing the way for his loophole.
ELISA
No, I 'm in earnest. I 'm curious to find out what a lecture is like. I think it will be my first.
COUNTESS
And your last, I assure you.
ELISA
Perhaps. Don't you want me to go?
EDOARDO
Why the idea! There 'll be three of us then.
FLORA (*still near the fireplace*)
No, two. I shan't go.
SILVIO (*astonished*)
What?
EDOARDO
At dinner you said —
FLORA
I 've changed my mind.
SILVIO
And are you the one —? (*Breaks into a laugh*) Ha, ha, ha!
ELISA
Silvio! (*Softly*) Are you going out?
SILVIO (*softly*)
Don't try to keep me. (*He goes out through the dining-room*)
GENERAL (*to the Countess*)
He 's satisfied. He was afraid he 'd have to go with them. But he 's got out of it and that 's all he wants.

COUNTESS (*to the General*)

It 's time to go. You give the signal.

CESARE (*softly to Elisa*)

What 's the matter?

ELISA

Nothing — just some foolishness.

COUNTESS

Good night, Signora Elisa! My dear Signor Nalli! No, no, don't disturb yourselves. We 'll take those young people in tow as we go out.

GENERAL

And let me once more offer a thousand good wishes.

CESARE

Thanks.

ELISA (*to the General, who is bowing before her*)

I 'll go to the door with you.

COUNTESS (*in passing, to Edoardo*)

Tomorrow you will accompany your aunt to the lecture, like a good nephew. It will be such a nice thing to do.

EDOARDO

I 'm going to improve my mind.

COUNTESS

And I have improved mine right here. Flora, dear, don't trouble yourself, I beg you.

[*The General, Elisa and the Countess go out through the door at the left. Cesare remains at the card-table gathering up and putting away the cards.*

EDOARDO (*to Flora*)

Won't you give me some explanation?

FLORA

Be kind enough not to ask for one.

EDOARDO

And are you being kind to me? You promised me —

FLORA

I changed my mind.

EDOARDO

I have at least a right to know —

FLORA

Right?

EDOARDO

Don't send me away in this uneasy state of mind.

FLORA

What have *you* to do with it?

EDOARDO

Oh, very well. (*Goes away without bowing*)

CESARE

It 's half past ten. I 'm going to bed; the day's over.

DON PAOLO (*entering from the drawing-room*)

I must say a hurried good-bye. Where 's Silvio?

FLORA

Silvio went out.

DON PAOLO (*uneasily*)

Went out?

CESARE

About five minutes ago.

DON PAOLO

With Edoardo?

CESARE

No, he left before Edoardo.

DON PAOLO

And did n't he say where he was going?

CESARE

No.

DON PAOLO (*to Flora*)
Not even to you?

FLORA
No, Don Paolo, not even to me. (*Seeing Elisa enter*) Perhaps he told mother.

ELISA
What?

FLORA
Do you know where Silvio went?

DON PAOLO
Did he tell you he was going to the club?

ELISA
No. I think he only went out to get a breath of fresh air. Why do you look so uneasy?

DON PAOLO
Oh, it 's nothing. But I had something to say to him. I 'll see if I can't catch up with him.

ELISA
If you want to leave word with me —

DON PAOLO (*lightly*)
Oh no, it is n't worth while. I 'll see you tomorrow. Pleasant dreams. (*He goes out through the main door*)

CESARE
Come, Elisa.

ELISA
Just a moment. I want to give a few orders.

CESARE (*kissing Elisa on the brow*)
Good night. (*Kissing Flora*) Good night. (*He goes out to the right*)

FLORA
Did Silvio ask you to go with us to the lecture?

ELISA

No, I suggested it myself.

FLORA

Did n't he ask you to chaperone his wife?

ELISA

He told me that he did n't like the idea of your being seen alone with Edoardo. Those were his very words. You know he can't bear Edoardo.

FLORA

When he has things of that sort to say, he should say them to me.

ELISA

It was a mistake on my part. When you refused to go I understood at once. I ought to have thought of it before. But it 's such a long time since I was young. I hope you 'll forgive me.

FLORA

I 'm not angry at you, mother. It is n't a part of your duty to know me — to know all the good and all the bad in me. But it *is* Silvio's duty. I exact it. He kept trying all evening to humiliate me. And the same thing has been going on for days. But nothing could humiliate me but my own wrong-doing; and I have n't done anything wrong. I 'm humiliated on his account. If I 'm not the " natural woman " that he admires, he picked me out as I was, he married me as I was.

ELISA

Listen, daughter. The troubles that can arise between simple-hearted people may all be reduced to a few essentials. You love Silvio and Silvio loves you. We can be sure of that to begin with.

FLORA

Edoardo has just been asking me what the trouble was. He talked about his anxiety in a low voice as if there were some secret between us. I detest that sort of thing. It was Silvio who put the secret into it. He had no right to do it.

ELISA

He had no right to do it?

FLORA

No. And no matter what he thought about Edoardo, he should n't have acted so rudely toward him and made him confess something that he was ashamed of. He should n't have offended him as he did. It forced me, out of mere sense of justice and pride, almost to defend Edoardo, or at least to let him think that I defended him. Silvio had no right to do it! He had no right to do it!

ELISA

I have lived twenty-six years with my husband in perfect love and accord; and perhaps it 's on that account that I don't understand you.

FLORA

Good night, mother. (*Kisses her and is about to leave the room*)

ELISA

Won't you wait for Silvio?

FLORA

He 's very late.

ELISA

Come here. Do you love him?

FLORA

I give what I receive.

ELISA

Then my mind is at rest. Don't hold it up against him.

FLORA

I won't if he 'll apologize.

ELISA

But it 's so much easier and better to apologize when no apology is asked for. Here he comes. Silvio!

FLORA

I 'll go. (*She goes out to the left*)

SILVIO (*enters very pale and makes a visible effort to control himself on seeing his mother*) I hoped to find Don Paolo still here.

ELISA

No, he left here to look for you.

SILVIO

At the club?

ELISA

I don't know. But in any case, if he did n't find you he must have gone home. — It 's very late. Why do you act so strangely?

SILVIO

I 'm all right. I 'm going to bed, mother.

ELISA

It seems to me that there 's very little cause for all this. Have you spoken to Flora?

SILVIO (*trying to hide his real emotion*)

To Flora? About what? Oh yes, that 's all right. Tell me tomorrow.

ELISA

It 's soon told. Flora guessed that we had put our heads together and arranged that proposal of mine

to go with them to the lecture; and she resented it. Not without reason. Don't you think so?

SILVIO

Yes, yes — thanks —

ELISA

I think you ought to make some explanation to Flora. She will expect you to say something. — What 's the matter, Silvio?

SILVIO

Oh heavens, nothing! What 's the matter with me? Am I pale? I must have taken a little cold. Am I flushed? Then it 's from walking too fast. Go, mother dear, I 'd like to see you started for bed. I vow that I was n't even giving a thought to those little troubles. Go along to bed. I 'll sit down here alone and write a couple of lines and then I 'll go to bed, too. But don't look at me like that. What things you blessed women will get into your heads all at once. What should be the matter with me, anyway? You 're all alike. (*Hesitating*) Has father gone to bed?

ELISA

Tell me if you have anything on your mind.

SILVIO

To bed — to bed — to bed, mother!

ELISA

Yes, dear, yes. (*She goes out to the right*)

[*Silvio rings the bell as soon as Elisa has gone out. Then he sits down at the desk and begins to write.*

AMBROGIO (*entering*)

Yes, sir?

SILVIO

These two notes must be delivered the first thing in

the morning. One goes to Don Paolo. Wake him up if you have to.

AMBROGIO

Yes, sir.

SILVIO (*writing*)

And the other to Tallori, the civil engineer. Do you know where he lives?

AMBROGIO

Yes, sir.

SILVIO

You 'll take them yourself, will you?

AMBROGIO

Yes, sir.

SILVIO

Remember — as soon as it 's daylight. Here they are. (*He gives Ambrogio the two notes*)

AMBROGIO

Any other orders, sir?

SILVIO

No. (*Ambrogio goes out; Silvio sits for some time with his head in his hands*) A thief! My father a thief!

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

The same room as in Act I. All the doors are closed. The fire is out. Ambrogio is just through dusting the room.

SILVIO (*comes through the main door with his hat and coat on*) Ambrogio, did you deliver those letters?

AMBROGIO

Yes, sir, at six o'clock this morning. And here 's a letter for you from Don Paolo. (*He picks up the letter from the desk and gives it to Silvio*) The servant brought it a little after seven, but you had already gone out.

SILVIO (*reads the note and makes a slight movement of anger*) Has nobody been here to see me yet?

AMBROGIO

Your mother was looking for you.

SILVIO

I mean nobody from outside.

AMBROGIO

No, sir.

SILVIO (*after standing a moment in thought*)

I 'm going out again. If Don Paolo or Tallori should call, ask them to wait here, so that we won't be running after each other. I 'll not be long.

AMBROGIO

Shall I say anything to your mother?

SILVIO

No, no. (*After some hesitation*) Is my father up yet?

AMBROGIO

He was dressing some time ago.

SILVIO

Remember, they 're to wait for me. (*He goes toward the main door*)

CESARE (*entering from his apartments*)

Hello, Silvio; are you going out?

SILVIO (*at the door*)

Yes.

CESARE

What 's all the hurry about?

SILVIO

Excuse me. (*Comes forward on the stage*) Good morning, father. (*Offers his hand*)

CESARE

And good morning, son. (*He presses Silvio's hand and retains it in his own; to Ambrogio*) Send my secretary to me.

[*Ambrogio goes out through the main door.*

CESARE (*to Silvio*)

Your hands are as cold as ice. Have you been out already?

SILVIO

Yes, for a moment. But after I had gone a few steps I remembered that I had forgotten a paper and came back to get it.

CESARE

Decent people get up early. I wager that at this moment your cousin Edoardo is in his first sleep.

SILVIO (*about to leave*)

Will you excuse me?

CESARE

Run along, run along.

[*Silvio is about to go out. Then he returns and goes up to his father, looking fixedly at him.*

CESARE

Well?

[*Silvio puts his hands on his father's shoulders and kisses him on the forehead.*

CESARE

Yes, boy. (*Pats him on the shoulder*)

[*Silvio goes out. Cesare, with a complacent air, begins to walk up and down as if to stretch his legs and whistles softly an aria from some old Italian opera. At one place he makes a false note and begins over again, but stumbles once more. Elisa enters from the dining-room carrying a small cup of coffee without a saucer or a sugar bowl.*

CESARE

Behold the faithful wife bringing the morning beverage! (*He takes the cup and stands as if waiting for Elisa to say something*) Go on. You should reply: "Prepared with my own white hands." Have you no respect for traditions? (*He takes a sip of the coffee, makes a grimace and sets the cup aside*) There must have been some great domestic upheaval.

ELISA

Why?

CESARE

No sugar in the coffee.

ELISA

Oh, what a head I have! I 'll go —

CESARE

No, no, don't bother. I 'll drink it bitter. They say it 's more wholesome that way. (*Drinks the coffee*) It 's the heat, and not the sweetness, that stimulates.

NORI (*entering through the main door*)

Did you send for me, sir?

CESARE

Yes. How about the correspondence of ten years back — is it kept here or in the office?

NORI

It 's here in the house. In the office we have nothing earlier than 1900.

CESARE

Then bring me the file for the first six months of 1894.

NORI

Yes, sir. (*He goes out through the main door*)

ELISA

I 've been a little worried about Silvio.

CESARE

Why, yes — can you account for that peculiar laugh and sudden disappearance last night?

ELISA

Matrimonial clouds.

CESARE

Storm clouds?

ELISA

They ought not to be; there 's no reason for it. But last night when he came in, Silvio seemed so upset that I wondered if he could have something else on his mind.

CESARE

What could he have on his mind? Has he not got everything that can make a man happy?

ELISA

And this morning he went out at such an extraordinary hour.

CESARE

He went out just now — half a minute before you came in.

ELISA

No!

CESARE

I 've just been talking to him.

ELISA

Do you mean to say that he has come back and gone out again?

CESARE

Gone out again! Oh yes; he said that after he had gone a few steps he remembered having forgotten a paper —

ELISA

I assure you that he was out of the house at seven o'clock — and it 's nine now.

CESARE

Oh, splendid!

ELISA

I found out from Flora that he did n't close his eyes all night; and he did n't say a word to her.

CESARE

And Flora did n't ask him —?

ELISA

Flora is n't the kind of person who asks. Flora waits.

CESARE

With dignity! Lovers' quarrels are soon over.

ELISA

I wonder why he did n't want you to know that he had been out already.

CESARE

He was ashamed to own up. (*Enter Nori*) Here we are. (*To Elisa*) I have to get to work. The department of domestic affairs is closed. (*Elisa goes out with the cup*) And I should n't advise you to get mixed up in that matter.

[*The door-bell is heard to ring.*

ELISA

No, no. I got mixed up in it yesterday and was sorry for it. (*She goes into the dining-room*)

CESARE (*to Nori*)

Just let me look for a certain paper. (*Enter Edoardo*) You here? I 've been maligning you; I thought you 'd be in your first sleep. Do you want to see me about anything?

EDOARDO

You 're the person I came to see.

CESARE

Sit down and wait.

EDOARDO

Oh no. Don't I deserve anything for getting up in the middle of the night? You might give me a little attention ahead of your secretary.

CESARE

Very well. (*To Nori*) Did you do as I told you yesterday?

NORI

I waited to make sure.

CESARE

To make sure about my orders? Have you ever known me to change my mind? Go ahead and do as I told you.

NORI (*goes close to Cesare and speaks in a very low tone*) I was told to inform you —

EDOARDO (*who has been standing looking at the picture by Greuze*) Oh, don't be afraid to speak out. I know all about it.

[*Nori looks questioningly at Cesare.*

CESARE

Speak out.

NORI

I was told to inform you that if you persist in selling, the Lamias people will go into bankruptcy today.

CESARE

That 's interesting news to their creditors, but it does n't alter my attitude. You may go now. Wait for me in the other room and we 'll go out together.

[*Nori bows and goes out through the outer door.*

CESARE (*to Edoardo*)

Well, go ahead and tell your business. (*He sits down and begins to look over the papers in the file*)

EDOARDO

I came to suggest a little speculation.

CESARE

That 's the door over there. I 've no time to waste.

EDOARDO

I assure you that I 'm talking seriously.

CESARE

So much the worse. I 've told you a hundred times that you ought not to meddle with business. I don't

like it. And I ought to have something to say about it, seeing that I provide the money.

EDOARDO

Oh, of course! After the magnificent present yesterday!

CESARE

I paid bills of yours to the amount of fifteen thousand *lire*.

EDOARDO

Which leaves me just as hard up as I was before.

CESARE

I give you two thousand *lire* a month.

EDOARDO

That pays ordinary expenses. But how about the extraordinary ones?

CESARE

Such as *Macao* at the club, for instance!

EDOARDO

I lost sixty thousand *lire*.

CESARE

A mere trifle.

EDOARDO

And the money 's due.

CESARE

Well, stir around and do something about it.

EDOARDO

That 's what I 'm doing.

CESARE

Ah, the speculation that you 've come to propose will have something in it for you too?

EDOARDO

I 'm a man of breeding and requirements, my dear uncle. The world is not an easy thing to deal with;

and if one can't succeed in changing it to suit oneself, the next best thing is to make use of it as it is. They 've offered me a percentage on the profits and a cash advance on the percentage. Legitimate gains. And believe me, I earn your monthly allowance too. It 's by no means a sinecure to be the nephew of a banker — a successful one — of your stamp. I 'm kept pretty busy just defending you.

CESARE

And who ever asked you to defend me? There 's no such thing as prosperity without enemies. Everybody can't have 'em.

EDOARDO

No. One has to deserve them.

CESARE

Exactly. And there 's no such thing as a man with any strength of will who does n't deserve to be hated. I happen to have some strength of will.

EDOARDO

I am also making some humble efforts to get what I want.

CESARE

The two cases are quite different. I had only one aim, and to reach it was long, hard, up-hill work.

EDOARDO

Oh, of course, you deserve some admiration, too!

CESARE

You don't understand anything about such things.

EDOARDO

Well, then, let 's talk about something that I do understand. Let me explain my proposition. If you don't like it, you don't have to accept it.

CESARE

Very well, let 's hear it. (*He begins to look over the papers again*)

EDOARDO

First of all, I want to tell you that there is back of me a serious, reputable man whom you know and esteem and whom I will name in good time. Are you listening?

CESARE

I can never listen so well as when I 'm busy with something else. Go ahead.

EDOARDO

Well then, the Republic of Ecuador wants to build a big military and commercial harbor. An order of General Rino, president of the Republic, guarantees the immediate concession of the Bay of Lamira, the exclusive privilege of navigation and fishing throughout the whole course of the Rio Pulcro for a hundred years, and the perpetual ownership of vast tracts of land — eighty thousand square miles, lying between parallels of latitude — (*Opens his notebook to consult it*)

CESARE

Go on, go on. Fire away.

EDOARDO

To the company which will assume the construction of the harbor. The man who has the grant is here in Milan now. I have seen the original order, drawn up in correct legal form.

CESARE (*still looking for the paper*) Where can it have got to?

EDOARDO

For twenty years after the completion of the harbor

all rights of anchorage and mooring will be in the sole possession of the construction company, which will sublet them through its own agents. Does it sound fantastic?

CESARE

Everything is possible.

EDOARDO

They wish to procure the benefits of civilization for a people —

CESARE

No, that belongs to the prospectus. We 'll wait with that.

EDOARDO

For heaven's sake stop looking through that stuff.

CESARE

There 's a document I have to get hold of.

EDOARDO

How can one talk to a man who —

CESARE

I tell you I have to find it. Go ahead.

EDOARDO

I suppose you 're surprised that an undertaking of such size and solidity —

CESARE (*finding what he was looking for*)

Here it is! (*He takes out a sheet and puts a paper-weight on it*) There! (*Rising and going toward Edoardo*) Well now, let 's finish this up. What does your friend Raspini want of me?

EDOARDO

Hello, that 's odd! How did you know that Raspini had anything to do with it?

CESARE

I recognized his style. Raspini is the Jules Verne of

finance. All the wild schemers make his place their headquarters. In the stock market they call him the Promoter of the Savages. I scented him as soon as you mentioned Ecuador. When I heard that mass of details I was sure of him. That 's his style; precision at a great distance. But he 's no fool, and sometimes he hits it.

EDOARDO

Oh, this time —

CESARE

Why yes. It 's possible that there may be in existence such places as the Bay of Lamira, the Rio —

EDOARDO

Pulcro.

CESARE

The Rio Pulcro and the territory bounded as you say. And even if they did n't exist, the combination might be real and profitable at the same time. So much the better, perhaps. Our business is finance, not geography.

EDOARDO

Exactly.

CESARE

Since there is an order of concession — and of that I have no doubt.

EDOARDO

There is one. There is, there is.

CESARE

A detailed explanation —

EDOARDO

With a big map in colors —

CESARE

And the plan of the harbor —

EDOARDO

The man who has the grant made it himself.

CESARE

Ah! Is he an engineer?

EDOARDO

No — he 's a lawyer. But in those countries —

CESARE

Of course. Very well, I 'll say neither yes nor no. Let Raspini come and see me tomorrow and we 'll talk it over.

EDOARDO

Not this morning?

CESARE

No.

EDOARDO

Could n't you possibly do it this morning?

CESARE

It is n't convenient.

EDOARDO

Because — tomorrow —

CESARE

It would be too late. I know that perfectly well. Because if the Lamias people go bankrupt today, Raspini will say good-bye to three hundred thousand *lire*, to put it conservatively. And so he brings me five or six parallels of latitude in a bundle for the purpose of inducing me to keep the House of Lamias afloat.

EDOARDO

Nobody is asking you to keep them afloat. Don't give them the death blow, that 's all. Suspend hostilities.

CESARE

I 'm not waging war on anybody. I 'm looking after my own interests.

EDOARDO

So is Raspini.

CESARE

And he is quite right.

EDOARDO

But if there could be created a common interest —

CESARE

In business there are no common interests. There is my own, which is my lookout, and that of the others, which does n't concern me. If your friend makes me a good proposition today in order to save three hundred thousand *lire*, he will make a still better one tomorrow when he has lost them. He seeks me out because he needs me. When his need becomes greater —

EDOARDO

Raspini foresaw all your arguments.

CESARE

You don't say!

EDOARDO

And on that account he sent me.

CESARE

To work on my feelings?

EDOARDO

No. Because he had his hands full with his own affairs. But there are some rather delicate matters involved.

CESARE

There are, are there? And how much does your delicate touch cost him?

EDOARDO

I 'm here for your own sake. I began with that other matter, because, if I had begun with this, you would never have paid any attention to my proposition. Young Lamias, the son —

CESARE

Fausto.

EDOARDO

Yes. He has completely lost his head. Last night at the club he railed against you like a madman.

CESARE

Poor devil!

EDOARDO

I won't repeat his words —

CESARE

I can imagine them. The trivial cant of bankruptcy, when people lose their heads. (*Laughing*) Oh, I know the oratory: swindler, traitor, usurer, liar — thief —

EDOARDO

And Silvio heard it all.

CESARE

No!

EDOARDO

He heard it.

CESARE

How do you know? Were you there?

EDOARDO

No, I was n't there.

CESARE

Who told you? How do you know? It is n't true.

EDOARDO

Silvio had promised to go to the club last night on account of that balloting.

CESARE

Yes?

EDOARDO

It appears that Fausto Lamias had made up his mind beforehand to throw his insults in Silvio's face.

CESARE

The coward!

EDOARDO

And that he dropped some hints of his intentions while dining at the club. When Silvio failed to appear, Fausto began to rave, but his friends gradually quieted him, so that about half past ten Marquis Orlenghi at last persuaded him to leave, intending to drive him home. Raspini went out with them, too. While Fausto was getting into Orlenghi's carriage and Raspini into a cab, they saw Silvio go into the club. Fausto wanted to rush up and face him, but Orlenghi pushed him into the carriage. Fausto then stuck his head out of the window and while the carriage was going off began to shout: (*imitating*) Nalli is a — a — (*in his ordinary tone*) I don't remember just what words he used. (*Imitating again*) I, Fausto Lamias, declare it.

CESARE (*after a long silence*)

And — you think Silvio heard it?

EDOARDO

Yes. Raspini looked out of the window of the cab and saw him running after Orlenghi's carriage. Of course he did n't catch up with it.

CESARE

So.

EDOARDO (*after a pause*)

Listen to me. Isidoro Lamias has been sent for in a hurry and will get here this morning at ten o'clock. Raspini is sure that he will be able to induce his son to apologize.

CESARE

What? He won't do anything of the sort.

EDOARDO

Considering that he came out of the club considerably the worse for liquor — which Raspini and Orlenghi himself would be quite ready to bear witness to.

CESARE

He won't apologize. He won't apologize.

EDOARDO

He would to save his father from bankruptcy. If you were to accept Raspini's proposals —

CESARE

I accept nothing. He won't apologize. I would n't do it myself.

EDOARDO

Remember that an apology would entirely blot out yesterday's affair. And Fausto can be induced to do it. And he has already fought six duels.

CESARE

Fought! (*Someone knocks at the outer door*) Who is it? (*Ambrogio enters*) What do you want?

AMBROGIO

Your son has learned that Signor Edoardo was here, and he would like to say a word to him.

CESARE (*to Edoardo*)

Go along. See him out there. (*Edoardo is about to leave the room*) No — wait.

AMBROGIO

He says he only wants a word with him. He 's waiting in the ante-room.

EDOARDO (*to Cesare*)

You see? It 's better —

CESARE (*to Ambrogio*)

Tell him to come in here.

EDOARDO

But, uncle —

CESARE (*to Ambrogio*)

Go along.

[*Ambrogio goes out.*

CESARE (*to Edoardo*)

I want to see him. What can he want with you?

EDOARDO

I don't know. (*A long pause*) You surely don't intend to say anything to him. Remember that you must n't think of such a thing.

SILVIO (*enters, self-possessed again, and says to his father*) I was sorry to have to disturb you.

CESARE (*standing near the fireplace*)

You 're not disturbing me. However, if it 's a confidential matter — I 'll leave you alone.

SILVIO (*smiling*)

No, father, there are no confidential matters so important as all that.

CESARE

Besides, I 'll be busy reading. (*He takes up a newspaper from the mantle-shelf and spreads it out as*

if to read; but he does not for a moment lose sight of his son)

SILVIO (*to Edoardo*)

I wanted to ask you — (*drawing him aside*) Tallori, the engineer, lives in the same house as you —

EDOARDO

On the floor above.

SILVIO

Do you know if he 's out of town?

EDOARDO

I don't think so. I met him last night at the club. What day is it today?

SILVIO

Thursday.

EDOARDO

He 's in town, I am sure. He has to attend that meeting about the hospital. Do you need —

SILVIO

Why yes, I do. He was to have been here this morning. I wrote him to wait here for me. He is n't at home.

EDOARDO

That 's strange! He never goes out in the morning. Did they tell you that he had left town?

SILVIO

The servant told me " Not at home " twice.

EDOARDO

You went twice to look for him! It must have been something very important.

SILVIO (*lightly*)

Oh, not especially.

EDOARDO

If *I* could be of any use —

SILVIO (*dryly*)

No, thank you. (*He turns toward his father and says in an off-handed manner*) Are you not going to the office this morning, father?

[*Cesare does not answer.*

SILVIO (*approaching him and tapping him affectionately on the shoulder*) Hello, I 'm talking to you.

CESARE

Yes, in just a moment.

SILVIO

Shame on you to be so late! (*He goes out through the dining-room*)

CESARE (*to Edoardo in a choking voice*)

Is he going to challenge Fausto, do you think?

EDOARDO

He did n't say so; but that 's the way it looks.

CESARE

But they 'll kill him!

EDOARDO

Ugh!

CESARE

They 'll kill him. That fellow is an expert swordsman.

EDOARDO

The whole thing is a lot of foolishness.

CESARE

He did it on purpose. Can't you see that he did it on purpose? What has Silvio to do with it? What can Silvio do about it? He ought to have said his say to me — to me — to me! And what do you think I could have proved? I could have proved that the very thing he 's yelping about was done

by his own father — the self-same thing! Here are the proofs. I just found them.

EDOARDO

What has that got to do with it?

CESARE

Has it nothing to do with it? Then the affair concerns me alone.

EDOARDO

Concerns you?

CESARE

The insult was offered to me. I 'll fight.

EDOARDO

Are you crazy? A man sixty years old!

CESARE

Oh!

EDOARDO

You never had a sword in your hand.

CESARE

Well, I can begin now. What 's the difference!

EDOARDO

A young man can't fight a duel with a man sixty years old.

CESARE

Why not — if he can insult him?

EDOARDO

He can't, and that 's all there is about it. It 's against the rules. He 'd never be able to find any seconds. It 's out of the question.

CESARE

I won't have it — I won't have Silvio —

EDOARDO

With such a lot of courage on your own account —

CESARE

I made the money. It 's his place to enjoy it. Oh, I 'll see about this business. I won't let my son fall into such a trap. There is the law.

EDOARDO

What do you mean to do about it?

CESARE

I 'll go to the police, right away.

EDOARDO

Good heavens! You would n't do a thing like that!

CESARE

Right away! I 'll go right away!

EDOARDO

Silvio would never forgive you.

CESARE

What do I care?

EDOARDO

Oh, for God's sake, don't! Why, it 's an unheard-of thing. We 'd have to get out of here in disgrace — you, Silvio, myself, the whole lot of us. We 'd never be able to hold up our heads again.

CESARE

There is the law.

EDOARDO

Remember that after such an act Fausto would have a right to refuse any reparation.

CESARE

Let him.

EDOARDO

And everybody would be on his side. They are already — in secret.

CESARE

Of course they are.

EDOARDO

And the whole thing would be thrown into the limelight. And what people are now whispering under their breath, they would say openly, and enlarge on it, and put it down in black and white.

CESARE

What, pray?

EDOARDO

Why, that you entered into an agreement with the Lamias people to support the stock of the Exchange Bank; that you pledged yourself to buy, and that you sold secretly.

CESARE

And was n't Isidoro Lamias in agreement with the Ramigis ten years ago? And did n't he pledge himself to buy, too? And did n't he sell? And did n't the Ramigis fail?

EDOARDO

What Isidoro Lamias may have done does not justify —

CESARE

You, too, of all people! And only last night you were pestering me for a share of the profits!

EDOARDO

Provided the thing had already been done. But I did n't advise you to do it.

CESARE

Ah! Your conscience keeps on the safe side.

EDOARDO

I have nothing to do with it. If Silvio should happen to find out —

CESARE

It 's not for Silvio to judge his father.

EDOARDO

Nevertheless —

CESARE

It 's not for him, I tell you. I make the money — he spends it.

EDOARDO

But when it becomes a question of honor!

CESARE

I have always been honorable in my business dealings. Let 's get through with this.

EDOARDO

I 'll warn Silvio first. But I won't let you go. Tomorrow you would regret it more than anything you ever did in your life. Better a thousand times to get run through with a sword.

CESARE

Yes, for somebody else to get run through!

EDOARDO

For oneself, too! Life is a good thing to squeeze out and throw away. But it 's impossible for me to take Silvio's place.

CESARE

It certainly is! (*Looking him in the eyes*) I warn you that if anything should happen to Silvio, it won't benefit you in any way. Do you understand?

EDOARDO

Uncle!

CESARE

Keep that in your mind. I made the money for him. As long as he is alive, there will be some for you, too — and to spare. — But I made it for him. If I should lose him, I 'd throw my money to the dogs and kick you out to starve.

EDOARDO

Permit me to call your attention to the fact that I came here to propose a compromise. Do as you please. But don't do anything on the spur of the moment. Remember you have the whole day to think it over. Good-bye.

CESARE

You won't say a word to Silvio, will you?

EDOARDO

No.

CESARE

Where are you going?

EDOARDO

Raspini is waiting for his answer. Do you accept?

CESARE

I've never allowed sentiment to influence me in my business affairs. Never. Absolute separation. It's a principle. To violate it would be to throw open the doors to ruin — and to commit a dirty act. I don't care anything about loss or gain; I've lost millions without sacrificing an hour's sleep. I'd give a hundred thousand *lire* to anybody who showed me how to get out of this mix-up.

EDOARDO

Talk!

CESARE

A hundred thousand *lire* — on the table.

EDOARDO

Is that so? It might be worth while to think over that proposition. — No, there is no way out.

CESARE

Very well. You may thank Raspini for giving me

a first chance. But a man does n't do business with a knife at his throat. (*Rings the bell*)

EDOARDO

Are you really going to the police?

CESARE

Did n't you just tell me that I have till this evening? That 's twelve hours. I 'll call Nori and go to the office. (*Goes to the desk, gathers up the letters and closes the file*) Is nobody coming? (*Calls in a loud voice*) Ambrogio, Ambrogio.

FLORA (*entering from the right*)

Can I do anything for you, daddy?

CESARE

Where were you?

FLORA

I was out there holding a consultation with mamma and her dressmaker.

CESARE

Where can Ambrogio be?

FLORA

I don't know. I 'll go and look for him.

CESARE

No, don't trouble yourself. I wanted him to call Nori for me; but I 'll go myself. (*He goes out through the main door*)

EDOARDO

Flora, be good enough to tell aunt that I 'll call for her about half past two, perhaps a little earlier.

FLORA

Call for her?

EDOARDO

To go to the lecture. It 's at three. Did you sleep well?

FLORA

Very well, thank you. But mother is n't going to the lecture.

EDOARDO

It was herself who proposed —

FLORA

I know she was going to send word to you this morning. Perhaps she has already done so. Anyway she is not going.

EDOARDO

Too bad! I wanted to see how she 'd take it. You 're used to lectures; but aunt has never heard one in her life. I was interested.

FLORA

If you want to speak to her about it, I 'll call her.

EDOARDO (*after a slight pause*)

Were you aware last night that you were treating me very badly?

FLORA

I am always aware of what I am doing. But I deny that I treated you badly. I simply did not care to reply to your impertinent questions.

EDOARDO

Impertinent! I could n't believe you so fickle as to change your mind from one minute to the next.

FLORA

Mother, too, has changed her mind.

EDOARDO

Oh, I was expecting her change of mind. I wanted to have it confirmed by you because it explains yours. You both obeyed the same command.

FLORA

I am not in the habit of obeying commands.

EDOARDO

Not even when they come from Silvio — whom you love?

FLORA

You may be right. I stand corrected.

EDOARDO

That good old Silvio can't endure me. I wonder why? I praise his pictures, tolerate his jokes, smile at his witticisms. (*Looking at Flora*) I admire everything that belongs to him.

FLORA

Do you say all this in the hope that I 'll repeat it?

EDOARDO

Of course.

FLORA

Very well, I 'll repeat it. I 'll try to put you back into his good graces. Silvio has a generous nature.

EDOARDO

An easy thing for happy people to have.

FLORA

Are *you* so unfortunate?

EDOARDO

You think I 'm a bad lot, do you? Well, I 'm proud of it. Nietzsche, the philosopher, says that goodness is the virtue of mediocre minds. A friend of mine once told me that I was as perverse as a woman.

FLORA

Much more.

EDOARDO

Much more! I 'm glad you think so.

FLORA

And the said friend was the young and attractive hunchback of the Carpathian family?

EDOARDO

No. The Marchioness di Raplitz was blind as regards me.

FLORA

She had faith in you.

EDOARDO

Why, yes, she had, poor thing! And you, too, in your heart of hearts, have faith in me.

FLORA

I too, poor thing!

EDOARDO

The time will come when you 'll agree with me.

FLORA

Are you sure?

EDOARDO

Absolutely sure. You are the only person in whom I recognize an affinity.

FLORA

A sister soul!

EDOARDO (*looking at her with admiration*)

How well that dress suits you! It does your beauty full justice.

FLORA

It 's a present from Silvio.

EDOARDO

I could have sworn that you would make that answer.

FLORA

Why?

EDOARDO

Oh, because I was sure that at my admiration, which was — somewhat —

FLORA

Indiscreet.

EDOARDO

Very indiscreet — you would trot out the little defensive lie of naming your legitimate lord and master.

FLORA

How do you know it 's a lie?

EDOARDO

Silvio could n't have chosen anything so — statuesque. The most he did was to fasten the pins at the collar — since he 's so particular about that. But I wager that he does n't like to see you dressed that way. Own up. I can make so many good guesses concerning you!

FLORA

Rest assured that I can't return the ccmpliment.

EDOARDO

That 's a mistaken policy on your part. If you knew what idea was in my head at this moment you would perhaps try to divert me from it.

FLORA

I 'm not inquisitive. (*Pause*) Is it something that has to do with me?

EDOARDO

Indirectly. It 's a naughty thought and hence a seductive one. And it tempts me. And it would be to my own advantage. And I could put it into execution inside of an hour. Shall I permit myself to be tempted? Give me your answer, Sybilla.

FLORA

Why — I know nothing about it.

EDOARDO

But think what a fine thing it is to govern events without understanding them.

FLORA

The Sybilla predicts, she does n't govern. You 'll follow your own inclination.

EDOARDO

It is said.

[*An electric bell rings.*

FLORA

That 's mother showing her dressmaker out. She 'll be here in a moment.

EDOARDO

I 'll leave you.

FLORA

Oh no. Please stay, so that it won't look as if we had any secrets in common.

EDOARDO

Have we got to that stage already?

[*Elisa enters.*

FLORA

Mother, Edoardo is terribly disappointed because you 're not going to the lecture with him. You ought to let yourself be persuaded.

ELISA (*to Edoardo*)

No, no, really. Thank you ever so much, but I don't feel like it.

EDOARDO

I don't dare to insist. I 'll see you this evening, then.

ELISA

Are you coming this evening?

FLORA

Imagine his not coming!

EDOARDO (*to Elisa*)

Don't you want me to come?

ELISA

Why, of course. Do just as you wish.

EDOARDO

You asked me in such a tone.

ELISA

Why, the idea! You 've been here every evening since Silvio came.

EDOARDO

We get along so well together! I 'll see you this evening, aunt.

ELISA

Very well.

EDOARDO

And I 'll follow my own inclination.

[*Flora bows slightly. Edoardo goes out through the outer door.*

FLORA (*after a silence*)

Nobody could reproach me for having made him too welcome.

ELISA

Nobody thinks of reproaching you.

FLORA

Silvio does n't reproach me; he keeps his reproaches to himself. It 's much worse.

ELISA

It seems to me that he has something else on his mind.

FLORA

Something more important than his wife?

ELISA

I don't know. But I saw him a little while ago walking up and down in the courtyard like a lost soul.

FLORA

Either he 's still uneasy about me after your explanation of last night — and I don't like that; or else he has, as you say, something else on his mind — and I have a right to know about it.

ELISA

Why not ask him?

FLORA

I don't care to beg for confidences. — You 're surprised, are n't you, to see a wife who is n't docile?

ELISA

And should n't I be surprised?

FLORA

Do you think you should? What do you think of me?

ELISA

I think you frighten me a little.

FLORA

Like a person whom you don't know.

ELISA

Whom I no longer know.

FLORA

And I know *you* so well. You 're an adorable, enslaved darling.

ELISA

I suppose there 's some truth in that.

FLORA

And sometimes I envy you your whole-souled surrender.

ELISA

You 're capable of it, too.

ELISA

Oh no. One has to be born with it. I 'm something of an anarchist, mother.

ELISA

An anarchist? Since when?

FLORA (*laughing*)

Oh, I 've been one for a long time — much longer than you 'd believe.

SILVIO (*heard from outside the entrance door*)

Come in, come in. (*He enters with Don Paolo*) Oh, are you folks here? I 've got to have a talk with Don Paolo, so I hope you 'll forgive me if I send you away.

DON PAOLO

Please excuse us.

ELISA

Not at all!

DON PAOLO

You know that since last evening —

ELISA

Why, certainly.

FLORA

Good morning, Don Paolo.

DON PAOLO

Good morning.

[*Elisa and Flora go out to the right. Silvio closes all the doors as soon as the women have gone out.*

SILVIO

Many thanks for your solicitude. I 've been raving around here like a wild beast in a cage for the last three hours.

DON PAOLO

I wrote you that I 'd be here.

SILVIO

And I told you in my note that I intended to go to your house at seven o'clock to see you about something very important and urgent. I also told you that Tallori would be there, too. You ought to have waited for me and not written.

DON PAOLO

I absolutely had to see certain persons.

SILVIO

You suited your own convenience, I must say. But now that you 're here, don't let us lose any more time. I would rather have discussed this matter at your house. Tallori must have gone there.

DON PAOLO

Tallori will be here in a short time.

SILVIO

Have you seen him?

DON PAOLO

We 've been together all morning.

SILVIO

You might at least have let me know.

DON PAOLO

You 're right. I thought of it too late. I 'm awfully sorry. First of all I want to tell you that Tallori and I are entirely at your disposal.

SILVIO (*astonished*)

You know already?

DON PAOLO

I know already.

SILVIO

Surely the thing is n't public!

DON PAOLO

No. Only the two persons present when it happened know about it.

SILVIO

Who are they?

DON PAOLO

Marquis Orlenghi and Raspini.

SILVIO

A man that 's all mouth!

DON PAOLO

Raspini has particular reasons for not letting it get out.

SILVIO

And how do you come to know about it?

DON PAOLO

I 've been talking to Orlenghi.

SILVIO

And he told you?

DON PAOLO

Yes.

SILVIO

And he told Tallori also?

DON PAOLO

He told Tallori also.

SILVIO

And I was going to ask you to try to invent some pretext for the affair!

DON PAOLO

Orlenghi is a very discreet fellow.

SILVIO

So it appears — since he has blabbed to both of you!

DON PAOLO

We went to him and asked him about it.

SILVIO

And asked him about it? I write you that I want to see you about something important and urgent — and you go off straight to Marquis Orlenghi!

DON PAOLO

It was n't hard to guess.

SILVIO

Why, it was the most miraculous guess I have ever heard of. And, as I don't believe in miracles, you 'll have to explain.

DON PAOLO

All right.

SILVIO

No, wait a minute. There 's something else. Why did you want to keep me from going to the club last evening?

DON PAOLO

Because — in fact — I foresaw —

SILVIO

But that 's an unheard-of thing! Could you foresee that anyone would call my father a thief?

DON PAOLO

Let 's leave the particular word out of the question.

SILVIO

But that 's what it was. It 's been shrieking in my mind all night. Thief was the word — thief — thief, you understand! And it was said of my father!

DON PAOLO

The fellow used the first word that came into his head. If a man wants to fling a stone he does n't

first look at the color of it. I foresaw that Fausto would work himself into a passion.

SILVIO

Against my father?

DON PAOLO

Yes.

SILVIO

But he took himself off, you understand — as fast as two horses could drag him. I ran after him, but — Your Marquis probably did n't tell you that.

DON PAOLO

He told me that, too. It was he who drove him away. Fausto wanted to go back.

SILVIO

Are you defending him?

DON PAOLO

I 'm willing to be your second against him. But on my honor I assure you that Fausto is a fine young fellow — like yourself.

SILVIO

Oh! I 'll release you from any obligation if you want me to. You have a perfect right to withdraw. I can find a hundred —

DON PAOLO

If you had n't hunted me up, I should have come to you myself.

SILVIO

If you defend him you approve of him.

DON PAOLO

I approve of what he is about to do, and I deplore what he has done. He was crazy.

SILVIO

Then let him go to the insane asylum.

DON PAOLO

The House of Lamias is on the verge of bankruptcy and Fausto is persuaded that its ruin is due to your father.

SILVIO

In what way?

DON PAOLO

I don't know. I don't know much about such things.

SILVIO

There 's no need to understand details. You know my father. You know he 's the best of men. Don't you?

DON PAOLO

I know nothing to the contrary. You asked me why I foresaw Fausto's outbreak, and I 'll explain. Last night I dined at the club. He was there, too — in a state of dangerous excitement. I myself had asked you not to miss the balloting, and so I hurried here to keep you away. You had half promised me —

SILVIO

Yes.

DON PAOLO

And while I was in there playing the piano —

SILVIO

I left the house on account of a little childish pique. I did n't even know where I was going. I found myself at the door of the club without noticing where I was. It was fate. But it was a lucky fate.

DON PAOLO

When I found that you had gone out, I ran to the club. Nobody had seen you. They told me that Orlenghi had driven Fausto away. I breathed again. And then this morning came your note. I went at

once to see Tallori and we decided to find out what Orlenghi had to say. He 's my good friend and thinks very highly of you. I was anxious to make sure that Fausto had not confided in some rascal.

SILVIO

What difference would it make?

DON PAOLO

Because I, too, was anxious to be able to offer some pretext.

SILVIO

Very well — thanks. There are other things that you ought to explain; but for the present we must attend to the most urgent. As soon as Tallori comes, you must call on Fausto Lamias, who certainly expects you. At least I should hope so. My message is simple: no compromise. Is that understood?

DON PAOLO

It has n't come to that yet.

SILVIO

And what has it come to, pray?

DON PAOLO

I asked Tallori to let me see you alone first. I hoped to be able to break my news gently — since you must be told. The ruin of the Lamias people is owing — to a business deal of your father's.

SILVIO

It is n't true!

DON PAOLO

I 've seen the proofs.

SILVIO

You lie! You lie! It is n't true!

DON PAOLO

What object could I have in lying?

SILVIO

I don't know. You must have some reason — or they must have deceived you. They must be mistaken themselves. I don't care to know anything about it. I only know that it is n't true.

DON PAOLO

Do you believe that I 'm your friend?

SILVIO

It 's much easier for me to doubt your friendship than my father's honesty.

DON PAOLO

In business —

SILVIO

The business dealings of honorable men are clean. There is only one kind of honesty. A man who is honest in his life is honest in his business. My father is the most upright and generous man that I know. An honorable man would ruin nobody.

DON PAOLO

Listen to me.

SILVIO

No. You 're doing a despicable thing. You offend me a thousand times more than that other fellow did. Even if it were true, one does n't say such a thing to a son about his father. The very fact that it 's repeated shows that it 's a lie. I don't believe you. Leave me alone.

DON PAOLO

Fausto won't listen to reason. He knows that nobody can have any doubts as to his courage. After your cousin Edoardo, he 's the best swordsman in

Milan. But in this case he thinks of nothing but to avenge his father. He wants to give you satisfaction for everything in the manner and measure that you wish it. But he wants first — I 'm repeating Orlenghi's exact words, which are also Fausto's — he wants first to arrange a tribunal of honor to prove —

SILVIO

That he bawled out the truth? Why, yes! Bring along the tribunal of honor! And let him prove it! And when he has proved it, I 'll go down on my knees and ask his pardon. But let him prove it! Because if he can't, I won't make trouble for you or anybody else. I 'll knock out his brains in the street.

DON PAOLO

Orlenghi thinks he might be induced to change his mind if your father would n't persist in bringing about this failure.

SILVIO

An extortion!

DON PAOLO

An act of justice.

SILVIO

That 's enough! That 's enough! You sicken me. That 's enough! I won't be forced to listen to all this disgusting stuff. That 's enough! I 'm to induce my father — pooh!

DON PAOLO

Think it over.

SILVIO

Do you know what answer my father would give if

I should insult him by making such a suggestion? He 'd kick me out of the house like a dog!

DON PAOLO

You don't need to tell him the whole story. But you could try to work on his best feelings. He was always a friend of the Lamias family. And he would n't be able to refuse you anything. Your father is a generous-hearted man.

SILVIO

Generous-hearted as a thief, is he? Get out of here!

DON PAOLO

Silvio! Silvio!

AMBROGIO (*entering*)

Signor Tallori. (*He goes out again*)

TALLORI (*entering impetuously*)

There 's nothing to be done. There 's nothing more to be done. I met Raspini just now, frantic and furious. Your cousin, Edoardo, went up to Fausto when he was coming out of his house and slapped him in the face.

SILVIO (*to Don Paolo*)

Oh!

TALLORI

He had been waiting for him at the door. There were two young officers with Fausto at the time, and he at once asked them to arrange about a meeting place.

SILVIO

And how about me?

TALLORI

You, my dear fellow, will have your turn later on, provided that —

SILVIO

It 's out of the question. The quarrel is mine. Nobody can take it out of my hands. It 's out of the question, I tell you. It 's a plot. I was the first one to be insulted.

DON PAOLO

Don't get excited. Don't get excited.

SILVIO

Do you people see what you 've done? You ought to prevent this other affair at any cost, because it was your fault. What am I to do? What am I to do? At daybreak — I sent to you at daybreak. You ought to have waited for me. You ought to have come. By this time everything would have been arranged.

TALLORI

Who could have foreseen —

SILVIO

And Edoardo, that despicable cur!

DON PAOLO

What? It 's plain that he found out about it — and on the impulse —

TALLORI

Not at all — the thing was meditated.

SILVIO

Meditated!

TALLORI

I should n't dare to say that it was agreed upon, but it was certainly meditated. Edoardo knew last evening what had happened. And last evening, after having found out about it, he had a long, quiet talk with Raspini, who sent him to your father with proposals for a compromise.

SILVIO

To my father?

TALLORI

And Edoardo went.

SILVIO

I saw him.

TALLORI

When?

SILVIO

Here, about an hour ago, talking to my father. — And how about these proposals?

TALLORI

Oh, Raspini was too excited to explain. He hoped that to keep you from fighting a duel with Fausto — However, your father would n't hear of it.

SILVIO (*to Don Paolo*)

Do you see? Do you see?

TALLORI

And Edoardo went straight from that conversation to wait at Fausto's door.

SILVIO

Come with me to my father.

DON PAOLO (*brusquely*)

No, no, no. There are other things to be done just now. Talk to your father yourself, if you like; but it won't do any good. Tallori and I will go at once to Fausto to deplore what has happened and ask him to give us the precedence. He won't do it because it won't be in his power. The affair with that brute of a cousin of yours is already under way, and the seconds are military men, and not two temperate good-for-nothings like ourselves. Don't worry about your personal honor. You were the first one in the

lists, and we are to blame for this accident. Your letters are here to prove it. Nobody will think any the worse of you.

SILVIO (*covering his face with his hands*)

Oh!

TALLORI (*affectionately*)

You 've got the right on your side, Silvio. Don't lose your grit!

DON PAOLO

In the meantime you must not go out of the house. I 'll come back and meet you here. And you must take no steps with regard to Edoardo.

TALLORI

No, for Heaven's sake, don't! Raspini told me that there 's a tremendous money stake back of this affair. I 'll find some way of clearing the thing up. And if it 's found to be the case, you understand that —

SILVIO (*to Don Paolo*)

You saw proofs, you say, that — my father —

DON PAOLO

Yes. So did Tallori.

SILVIO (*to Tallori*)

You too? — I 'll have to see them too.

DON PAOLO

Very well, you 'll see them. (*To Tallori*) Let 's be off.

[*Don Paolo and Tallori go out through the main door. Silvio rings the bell. Ambrogio enters.*

SILVIO

Listen, Ambrogio. I want you to tell my mother and my wife that I have a very bad headache and have gone to my room to rest a little, as I did n't

sleep last night. I don't want anyone to come, and I don't need anything but a little rest. Tell them that you saw me yourself and that I was all right.

AMBROGIO

Would n't you like me to bring you —

SILVIO (*forcing himself to smile*)

No, no, no. I 'll take a good nap and in two hours I 'll be all right again. You may go.

[*Ambrogio goes out. Silvio, bewildered and dazed, falls into a chair and sits motionless looking straight before him as though absorbed in thought. Cesare enters to go to his apartments. He sees Silvio, who has not noticed him. He approaches as if to speak to him. Silvio sees him, looks at him and hangs his head. Cesare stands a moment looking at him as though he expected him to speak, and then goes out slowly.*

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

The same room as in the preceding acts.

DON PAOLO (*enters through the door at the left and is about to go out through the main door*) Ambrogio, will you please tell Signora Flora —

AMBROGIO (*who has been waiting for him*)

Excuse me, Don Paolo; I have been waiting for you here. Signora Flora wishes to speak to you.

DON PAOLO

So much the better. Where is she?

AMBROGIO

She is at lunch with the master and mistress. But she told me to call her as soon as you came out of the young master's room.

DON PAOLO

Call her now.

[*Ambrogio enters the dining-room where Cesare, Elisa and Flora may be seen seated at the table. He speaks to Flora in a low voice. She rises, says a few words to her parents-in-law and comes upon the stage.*

FLORA

I hope you 'll pardon me, Don Paolo, if I have delayed you.

DON PAOLO

Not at all. It just happened that I had a message for you.

FLORA

Is it true that my cousin Edoardo has insulted Fausto Lamias?

DON PAOLO

How did you come to hear of it?

FLORA

Is it true?

DON PAOLO

Yes. But how did you hear of it?

FLORA

All the servants know about it. Mother's maid told me. I did n't dare to say anything about it to Silvio's parents. How did it happen? Why? Since last evening Silvio has n't been himself. At first I thought nothing of it. But your visit this morning and Signor Tallori's visit, Silvio's obstinate withdrawal and refusal to see anyone except you two: all these things and Edoardo's act seem to point to something special. — May I hope to know —

DON PAOLO

Last evening at the club Fausto Lamias spoke of your father-in-law in offensive terms. Silvio — found out about it and at once asked Tallori and me to arrange for —

FLORA

Is he going to fight a duel?

DON PAOLO

I just brought him a letter on the part of Tallori and myself. In it we inserted the notes he wrote to us last evening. We affirm his priority, we deplore the violent intrusion of a third person into an affair which belongs to him by every right, we recognize that Lamias, after the brutal act of Signor Edoardo

Falcieri, may legitimately refuse every explanation, and we withdraw the challenge.

FLORA

Fausto Lamias has refused?

DON PAOLO

Point blank.

FLORA

And he 's going to fight with Edoardo?

DON PAOLO

Tomorrow morning.

FLORA

Oh! Poor Silvio!

DON PAOLO

Of course all the bullies about town will make sport of him.

FLORA

What a humiliation!

DON PAOLO

He must be satisfied with keeping the esteem of decent people. The others will be on Edoardo's side, of course.

FLORA

Edoardo certainly did not know that Silvio —

DON PAOLO

He knew.

FLORA

Silvio ought to have asked him to be one of his seconds.

DON PAOLO

Thank you for preferring him to me.

FLORA

With you as the other.

DON PAOLO

Thank you for the company. I would not have accepted.

FLORA

Why? Edoardo is a near relative. To pass him over was an affront. And it 's easily seen that it was resentment that induced him — No?

DON PAOLO

I am in no position to enlighten you as to the chivalrous standards of your cousin. His psychology seems to me — rather — troglodytic.

FLORA

But why do you suppose he wanted to fight?

DON PAOLO

I presume he itched to use his hands — like a porter.

FLORA

What 's to be done now? What does Silvio say? What did you advise him to do? Oh, what an unfortunate thing! And when his father comes to hear about it!

DON PAOLO

Do you think he does not know about it?

FLORA

At luncheon he was in the best of humors.

DON PAOLO

Was he quite as usual?

FLORA

Rather more lively than usual. In fact, to hide my own preoccupation, I asked him if he had just made some good business deal.

DON PAOLO

And what did he say?

FLORA

What does that matter now?

DON PAOLO

Please tell me.

FLORA

He answered, smiling: "Excellent! I've just lost a hundred thousand *lire*."

DON PAOLO

The creditors of your cousin Edoardo have had better luck than that.

FLORA

What do you mean?

DON PAOLO

You will find out from your husband.

FLORA

May I see Silvio? Since you seem to be the privileged person.

DON PAOLO

Don't be offended on account of my privilege. It was only while there was hope of a solution by duel that Silvio could n't speak to you. I know that he 'll tell you everything, no matter what it costs him. There has devolved upon me a very painful duty. I have been forced to bring him proofs and documents which have destroyed one of his vital faiths. Please don't ask me more. He himself asked me to speak to you in those terms and to beg you not to put up any opposition before his father and mother to a certain irrevocable decision.

FLORA

Decision?

DON PAOLO

He is not in a position to explain the reasons at

present and he must tell his parents without delay. He wants to go back to Rome.

FLORA

When?

DON PAOLO

Tomorrow morning.

FLORA

Why, it 's absurd!

DON PAOLO

He wanted to go this very evening, but the thought of you kept him.

FLORA

It 's absurd! It 's absurd!

DON PAOLO

Silvio will tell you the rest. At present he is enduring a test such as few men ever have to meet in their lives. But he is a strong man and — (*Flora nods with an ironical smile*) You would do well, believe me, to repress that smile. You might not like to reproach yourself with it later on.

FLORA

Dear Don Paolo, don't try to read in books that are closed to you. You might find disagreeable things in them.

DON PAOLO

That makes small difference as far as I 'm concerned. Whether I saw well or ill, I ask your pardon in any case. But whatever you do, believe in Silvio. He was never more worthy of your trust in his life.

FLORA

Was it you who advised him to go away?

DON PAOLO

One does n't come to such a decision through advice. But I approve of it and admire it.

FLORA

What will he tell his father and mother?

DON PAOLO

He has thought out a pretext.

FLORA

Something that is n't true?

DON PAOLO

There is a certain piece of work which he knows he has to do later on. He will tell his parents that it is urgent. You perhaps know —

FLORA

No. Silvio never talks about his work.

DON PAOLO

Will you stand by him?

FLORA

Going off like that would be a cowardly flight.

DON PAOLO

Only promise me not to raise any objections until Silvio has told you his secret. I am sure that he will tell you today.

FLORA

They are getting up from the table. If you don't want to be seen —

DON PAOLO

It does n't matter. I 'll stay. Will you promise me?

FLORA

Oh, very well.

[*Cesare and Elisa enter.*

CESARE

How are you, Don Paolo?

DON PAOLO

Good morning, sir. Good morning, dear lady.

CESARE (*to Flora*)

Do you mean to say that you 've been camped here — ?

FLORA

I had something to say to Don Paolo.

CESARE

You might have had him come in and sit down with us. Then you could have finished your lunch.

FLORA

I did finish.

CESARE

He might have had a cup of coffee, too. Unless, of course, it was something confidential.

DON PAOLO

Exactly. I was asking Signora Flora —

CESARE

Oh, of course when that 's the way! Great mysteries are brooding over the house today: confidential talks with Silvio, confidential talks with Flora —

ELISA

Have you seen Silvio?

DON PAOLO

Yes, I 've seen him. He 's quite himself again. His stomach was a little upset. He 'll be here in a moment.

CESARE

My wife was beginning to fear that he had some incurable disease.

ELISA

Now, now; don't exaggerate.

CESARE

Oh, go along. At luncheon you were positively shrouded in gloom. If I had n't been there to keep up the general spirits —

DON PAOLO

Oh! As far as anxiety for Silvio's welfare goes, I should n't be afraid to wager anything that you can match your wife.

CESARE

You think so, Don Paolo?

DON PAOLO

I 'm sure of it.

CESARE

Well, perhaps you 're right. Nobody 's perfect. Flora, hand me the newspaper; it must be there on the mantle-shelf.

FLORA

Yes, daddy.

[*Cesare sits down near the desk. Flora brings him the newspaper and remains standing near him.*

ELISA (*has sat down in the armchair near the fireplace; to Don Paolo, who is standing beside her*) There has been some trouble. Don't try to deny it. I don't want to know what it is and I don't ask, but I 'm certain that there has been trouble. All I ask you to tell me is that Silvio is not in any kind of danger.

DON PAOLO

I can assure you on my word of honor that he is not.

ELISA

I believe you. Thanks.

SILVIO (*entering from his apartments*)

Mother, you must give me a rousing good dinner tonight, with all the trimmings.

DON PAOLO

You 're going to make up for lost time with a vengeance.

SILVIO

I have n't had anything to eat since yesterday.

DON PAOLO

Fasting has its good and its bad sides. It cures —

ELISA

And it makes you hungry.

SILVIO

And besides, we 're to celebrate a piece of good news that I got this morning. Are you listening, Flora? [*Cesare becomes very attentive.*

FLORA

I 'm listening.

SILVIO

An order for two portraits.

ELISA

Honestly?

DON PAOLO

Those things seem to go in teams.

SILVIO

I was beginning to worry about losing my vogue — three months of loafing without a single order!

ELISA

Oh, but you have your name!

SILVIO

You know the portrait of Miss Cline, Flora — the one that took a prize at the Paris exhibit?

FLORA

Yes.

SILVIO

I 've got an order to paint her father and mother. Lord Cline is a Steward of the Jockey Club and a sanguinary exterminator of deer. I 'm to depict him on horseback, life size, dressed in a hunting suit.

DON PAOLO

With a real hunting horn?

SILVIO

No. But with a pack of bulldogs in a leash.

DON PAOLO

And how about his wife?

SILVIO

She 's to be on horseback too, with a falcon on her wrist. It was Lady Cline who introduced the falcon into English sport.

DON PAOLO

Why, that 's a wonderful stroke of luck!

CESARE (*aside*)

His accomplice!

ELISA

And are those people in Milan?

CESARE

In Milan? They 're in Rome, are n't they, Silvio?

SILVIO

Of course, father.

CESARE

I thought as much.

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

And are you going to Rome?

SILVIO

I shall have to.

ELISA

And is this the piece of good news that we are to celebrate?

SILVIO

I should have gone at the end of the carnival in any case. That 's in three weeks. You 're quite well again. We 've been here since the twentieth of November: two months and a half of absolute idleness. I have begun to get rusty.

ELISA

Are you going soon?

SILVIO

They 're going back to England soon after Easter. I must have a month and a half at least for sittings. The pictures are promised; and those people won't be willing to sit every day.

ELISA (*to Silvio*)

So when do you expect to go?

SILVIO

Tomorrow — tomorrow morning, by the Florence express.

ELISA

Why, there is n't even time to get ready. — And Flora?

SILVIO

I hope that Flora will go with me.

FLORA

I 'll do whatever you say.

ELISA

Oh, how bad you make me feel! And it 's so sudden! It would have been better if you had n't come — almost.

SILVIO

But, mother dear, I 'm just as sorry to have to leave you.

CESARE

Are you forgetting that I 'm here, too?

SILVIO

I hate to leave both of you. But a chance like this does n't occur twice in an artist's life.

CESARE (*rising and walking over to Silvio*)

So, you 're going tomorrow morning. Have you absolutely decided?

SILVIO

I must go.

CESARE

We 'll have to have a talk together — a long one.

SILVIO (*trying to smile*)

A long one, father? I 've scarcely time to pack my bags.

CESARE

The servant can do that.

SILVIO

And then I 've a thousand other little things to do.

CESARE

Oh, the little things can take care of themselves.

SILVIO

If you are going to try to keep me here, I ask you right now not to do so. It 's awfully hard for me to contradict you and overcome all those arguments of yours.

CESARE

Have I said one word about keeping you here? Have I ever opposed your slightest wish, or a preference of yours even? Never since you were born. It is n't a question of your going away, or at least not of that alone. I had intended to have a talk with you before you mentioned it.

SILVIO

I thought we 'd spend these few hours all together — with mother.

CESARE

Oh, your mother may be present if you like.

SILVIO (*quickly and eagerly*)

Oh no!

CESARE (*brusquely and severely*)

I hope you understand that I have nothing to hide.

ELISA (*frightened*)

What are you saying? What 's the matter? You frighten me. Why — ?

SILVIO

All right, whenever you like, father.

CESARE

Very well.

ELISA

What is it all about? Cesare!

CESARE

Don't worry, dear. You know that there can't be any serious trouble between Silvio and me. No misunderstanding can last long between people who think as much of each other as we do.

SILVIO

We do think a good deal of each other, don't we, dad?

CESARE

I should say we do! It would be unnatural if we did n't. Moreover, I don't lay any blame on you; but certain people have seen fit to interfere. (*Looks at Don Paolo*)

SILVIO

Father, if we must have a talk, let it be soon.

CESARE (*looking at his watch*)

I can't do it at once; I have some business that will take a few moments.

SILVIO

Can't you put off the business?

CESARE (*with some embarrassment*)

I did n't know that you had any intention of going away and I did know that you were in your room with a headache. I did n't suppose that you 'd be all right again so soon. It must have been about half an hour ago that I wrote. (*Coughing*) I expect someone — my nephew.

SILVIO (*wildly*)

Edoardo? Edoardo here?

CESARE (*with authority*)

Remember that I sent for him.

SILVIO

You? Well, I suppose you wanted him then. (*Is about to leave the room*)

DON PAOLO (*quickly*)

No, no!

ELISA (*terrified*)

Where are you going?

SILVIO

I 'm going to welcome him.

FLORA (*holding him back*)

Are you crazy?

CESARE

Stay here, I command you!

[*Elisa falls back into the armchair sobbing.*

SILVIO

There is not room enough for Edoardo and me in this house.

CESARE

There is room in this house for anybody I ask into it.

SILVIO

Have you made your choice?

FLORA (*to Silvio*)

Look at your mother!

SILVIO

You don't know.

FLORA

I know — and I understand your feeling. But don't make it ridiculous by suggesting such a rivalry.

SILVIO (*beside himself*)

With that fellow, eh?

DON PAOLO (*to Elisa*)

Dear lady, do what you can. Take him away from here.

SILVIO (*still beside himself*)

With that fellow! — And he gets the preference!

ELISA

Silvio, come away with me. Come, Silvio, if you don't want to kill me. (*She takes him by one arm, Don Paolo by the other, and together they lead him away toward his rooms*)

SILVIO

Yes, mother — yes, yes — we 'll go. My father has

driven me out. We 'll go, we 'll go! I feel myself going crazy here.

ELISA

Don't say such things. You 'll see that it 's not possible. Don't say such things. You 'll see —

DON PAOLO

You promised me —

FLORA (*embracing Cesare*)

Don't say anything, daddy. Don't say anything — please — don't excite him. (*Silvio is led into his apartments by Elisa and Don Paolo*) Silvio does n't know what he 's doing. And, believe me, he has right on his side. Not with regard to you, of course. It was ungrateful and inexcusable of him to try to avoid having a talk with you after you 'd asked him. But with regard to Edoardo — if I could only tell you!

CESARE

Yes, dear; yes, dear. I 've got myself in hand. Don't you get all wrought up too. You 'll see that everything will come out all right — of itself — in good time. To speak connectedly: everything will come out all right of itself in good time. I should never have dreamed that things could come to this pass. But — (*Edoardo enters through the outer door*) You 're here? Come into my room. (*He goes into his apartments*)

[*Flora, without looking at Edoardo, passes before him and is about to go into her own apartments.*

EDOARDO

Not even as much as a how 'd ye do? (*Flora does not reply*) What 's the meaning of this?

FLORA

You have mortally offended Silvio.

EDOARDO

What clumsy idiot told you so? Women should know nothing about such things. But seeing that you do know, please bear in mind that if there be one person in this world who has no right to reproach me, that person is yourself.

FLORA

I?

EDOARDO

Uncle is waiting for me. I 'll explain tomorrow.

FLORA

I don't ask you for explanations. But if you are anxious to give them, and they are such as I can repeat to my husband, please do it at once. You ought to be able to do it in a very few words.

EDOARDO

How far-sighted you are! One never knows what may happen.

FLORA (*offended*)

Oh!

EDOARDO

Your far-sightedness is not at all out of place. I 'll see you again before this evening.

FLORA (*quickly*)

No!

EDOARDO

What are you afraid of?

FLORA

Don't come back here. I forbid you. It would be a terrible thing if Silvio should meet you.

EDOARDO

Do you think you can prevent our meeting?

FLORA

I will not be here.

EDOARDO

We 'll see.

CESARE (*calling from his apartments*)

Edoardo.

EDOARDO

I 'm coming, uncle. (*To Flora*) In an hour, then.

FLORA

I will not! I will not!

EDOARDO

It 's agreed. I 'll find you here. (*Goes into Cesare's apartments*)

FLORA (*stands a moment in thought*)

No, no, no! (*She rings the bell; after a long silence*) The duel is tomorrow morning. (*Resolutely*) No. Impossible.

SERVANT (*entering*)

Yes, ma'am?

FLORA

My cousin, Edoardo, is with my father-in-law in his study. He will come out in a short time. If he should return later on and ask for me, please tell him that I 'm not at home.

SERVANT

But the young gentleman never asks if anybody is at home. He comes and goes like one of the family.

FLORA

Oh! Very well.

SERVANT

However, if you think —

FLORA

No, it does n't matter. (*Don Paolo enters from Silvio's apartments*) You may go.

[*The servant goes out.*

FLORA (*to Don Paolo*)

How is Silvio?

DON PAOLO

He 's quite calm, and has calmed his mother, too. He 's waiting for his father to send for him.

FLORA

Then it will begin all over again.

DON PAOLO

He acted that way because he was taken by surprise. Now he knows what to expect and is master of himself. — Has he come yet? (*He nods in the direction of Cesare's apartments*)

FLORA

Yes, he 's in there.

DON PAOLO

Have you decided to go with Silvio?

FLORA

I have not decided. But if it is necessary, I will go.

DON PAOLO

Do we part good friends?

FLORA

Why certainly: the best of friends.

DON PAOLO

I 'm afraid not. I 'm afraid that if I should try to read in a certain book which is closed to me —

FLORA

Oh — I don't want to read in it either. Let us leave it closed; it 's more prudent.

DON PAOLO

I don't think so. That 's the prudence of weakness. We should try to become acquainted with the truths that surround us, be they good or bad. If we ignore them, the good waste away and the bad grow more sinister. Silvio has been strong enough to look his truth in the face.

FLORA

Silvio's truth must be a very simple one.

DON PAOLO

All truths are simple.

EDOARDO (*enters from Cesare's apartments and calls backward*) Let things take their course, uncle. (*He crosses the stage to go out by the outer door. On the threshold he turns*) I 'll see you again soon, Flora. (*He goes out*)

[*Flora makes a slight movement toward him, but changes her mind.*

CESARE (*appearing on the threshold of his room*)

Flora, be good enough to call Silvio.

FLORA

Let me speak to him before you do. I think it will be better for everybody concerned. Please.

CESARE

All right; but be sure to call him. (*Goes back into his room*)

FLORA (*to Don Paolo, who is about to leave*)

Just one word. (*In a low voice*) Is Fausto Lamias a very fine swordsman?

DON PAOLO

I hope so with all my soul. (*He goes out after having made her a profound bow*)

FLORA (*going toward the door at the left*)

Silvio. (*Silvio enters*) I asked your father to let me talk to you first. I hope that when you and I have come to an understanding, your interview with him will prove less painful. To get me to assent to your plan before your father and mother, Don Paolo promised me that you would explain your reason. Won't you please explain it now?

SILVIO

I would have told you of my own accord even if you had n't asked me. But I should have preferred to postpone it. I need to collect myself — and find words. — It 's a hard thing to do. And I 've gone through a good deal since yesterday. Sit down. It 's a hard thing to do.

FLORA

Would you like me to help you?

SILVIO

How could you?

FLORA

Oh, believe me, I can form a pretty good idea of what it 's all about.

SILVIO

You can form an idea?

FLORA

Why yes. And for that very reason I feel uneasy. Because, you know, you 're the sort of person who makes mountains out of molehills.

SILVIO

No, no, no! You don't know what you 're talking about.

FLORA

Don't be so sure of that! Don Paolo told me that

he had brought you proofs and documents. And then came your objections to a talk with your father. It 's about the Lamias people, who are on the brink of ruin. (*Silvio looks at her in amazement*) For the last three days nothing else has been talked about in Milan. All the ladies are moaning over the lot of the handsome Fausto and berating your father.

SILVIO

They told you so?

FLORA

Oh no. But when things like that are in the air, one can't help finding out about them.

SILVIO

Tell me all you know about it.

FLORA

Oh heavens! Don't ask me to go through it all. I know that your father has proved the victor and those other people the vanquished.

SILVIO

And what do you deduce?

FLORA

Nothing. What should I deduce? It 's business.

SILVIO

Nevertheless —

FLORA

It 's business. That 's all there is to be said. I asked your mother about it yesterday — in an indirect way, of course — I asked her for some sort of explanation. And she answered, too: " It 's business — something which does n't concern us."

SILVIO

Some impenetrable retreat, eh — surrounding the Divinity?

FLORA

But it *is* something which does n't concern us.

SILVIO

On the contrary, does n't it seem to you that it concerns us rather closely?

FLORA

I should think you would see that on account of our very refinement and breeding it 's better for us not to know such things.

SILVIO

I presume that somebody told you that.

FLORA

Told me? I thought it out for myself. I 'm amazed that you could have gone along till now without —

SILVIO

Oh, *I* might have gone along for a thousand years.

FLORA

Yes, you live in the clouds. You don't even know the people who live in the same house with you.

SILVIO

No?

FLORA

You did n't even know that your father has the reputation of not being over-scrupulous in business.

SILVIO

I did not. Did you?

FLORA

Of course I did. And on that account I appreciated and still appreciate all the more his wonderful kindness to his own. The kindness of a person who is kind to everybody has no particular value. But to know that he 's as hard as steel to everybody else, and then to see him so indulgent to us, that has

made me feel a sort of continuous pride of conquest. Your father is a whole man — so modern.

SILVIO

And so your conscience is at peace?

FLORA

It has never been anything else.

SILVIO

Do you never wonder — where it comes from — all this wealth and luxury?

FLORA

Oh! (*shrugs her shoulders as if to say, "What does it matter?"*)

SILVIO

And you mean to tell me that you can enjoy it in peace without —

FLORA

What is there new in the situation?

SILVIO

Apparently you know all about it already.

FLORA

I should hate to have to think about such things.

SILVIO

How can you keep from thinking about them?

FLORA

Why, you 're ungrateful!

SILVIO

I know I am. And I 'm thinking about it.

FLORA

There are so many things in the world more worthy of our thoughts.

SILVIO

You think so?

FLORA

Why, yes. People like us have certain high mental and spiritual duties. Fate has placed us far above petty cares and humiliating realities. You have your great mission as an artist. There 's a certain class of activities — I don't know exactly how to express it — a cult of refinement, which depends entirely upon people like us. Why waste your energies in fussing with tiresome details? It 's so philistine, this habit of reducing everything to terms of money. Don't you think so? I 'm afraid your wife has sounder judgment than you. You 're not in touch with life. You 're an artist, outside of the world — far, far, far outside of it — away among the stars.

SILVIO

It 's a good thing I have you to call me back to earth.

FLORA

Of course it is. And that 's my particular duty. You noticed that I made no objections when you announced that you were going away. But when you and I have talked it over, you 'll see that we 'll stay here.

SILVIO

No, Flora. We 're going.

FLORA

I can't believe it.

SILVIO

We 're going. A little while ago I was sure that I should be able to make you feel the same ardor and faith as myself — that we should be entirely of one mind, in fact. Now I have no such expectation. You were right when you said that I don't know the

people in the same house with me. My ignorance began with you. But you 've opened my eyes. Poor Flora! How many things you know! And how well you bear up under your sad knowledge! It 's not worth while for me to wear myself out arguing with you. If we look at things from wholly different viewpoints, it is clear that what I was going to say could make no impression on you whatever. And my resolution is absolutely fixed.

FLORA

And what good is it going to do you to go away?

SILVIO

I 'll get rid of —

FLORA

Your father's money — since you force me to mention it — will be spent by you in Rome instead of in Milan.

SILVIO

Not at all!

FLORA

What?

SILVIO

Not at all.

FLORA

Do you think that to punish you for this obstinacy your father would refuse —?

SILVIO

I 'll do the refusing myself.

FLORA (*after a long silence; bewildered*)

I don't understand at all what you mean. (*Silvio gets up and walks about the room*) Repeat what you just said — I 'm sure I don't understand. And the annual allowance?

SILVIO

I have no more annual allowance.

FLORA

Are you going to refuse to take it?

SILVIO

Yes.

FLORA

Do you expect to tell your father so?

SILVIO

I should rather have said nothing about the whole affair. In Rome I should have found some way —

FLORA

Oh, the idea of it! To think of such a thing! No. It 's more impossible than a dream! Oh, Silvio, I assure you that when you think this over calmly, it won't seem credible.

SILVIO

It 's settled. And there will be no change. I refuse to get my living from the ruin of other people!

FLORA

And you could come to such a decision without consulting me?

SILVIO

My duty in the matter was plain.

FLORA

Your duty toward me, too?

SILVIO

Yes, Flora, my duty toward you, too. I hold myself responsible for your dignity.

FLORA

The dignity of poverty!

SILVIO

Not at all. Indeed, we deserve very little credit for

giving up father's money. Last year I made eighteen thousand *lire* by my work.

FLORA

A little less than the stables cost you.

SILVIO

And this year I 'll make a great deal more.

FLORA

It will be nothing in comparison with what you are giving up.

SILVIO

It 's so philistine, is n't it, Flora — this continual fussing about money?

FLORA

One must have money to be able to forget it.

SILVIO

Ah!

FLORA

You laugh? You who 've just been bragging about what you 've earned! Your dignity strikes me as rather superfluous.

SILVIO

I bragged about it to quiet your fears.

FLORA

I should like to see what you would do if you were really destitute.

SILVIO

Thousands upon thousands have to fight to keep alive.

FLORA

Would you offer your father such an affront?

SILVIO

Are you just beginning to think of that now? I 've

been tortured by not being able to think of anything else.

FLORA

And this is the way you repay him!

SILVIO

I love my father. I would do anything for him. But the sort of gratitude that is paid for seems to me rather suspicious.

FLORA

Nobody would ever think ill of you.

SILVIO

I would think ill of myself. I 'm astonished that you can't see that.

FLORA

Any other woman in my position would say the same thing.

SILVIO

A woman who was in love would n't.

FLORA

What has love got to do with it?

SILVIO

Exactly. It has nothing to do with it. You have n't been able to find a single word of love. You look on at this storm that 's going over me, and all you see is that it 's blowing away the money.

FLORA (*embracing him with ardor which grows more and more enticing and sensual*) Oh no, no, no! I see a thousand other things. I have a thousand other things I want to say. If you don't change your mind today, I know it 's all over. If you once go away, you 'll never make any compromise with your decision. And I must persuade you. I must. I must defend myself, and I must defend you against

yourself. Don't do anything rash — if you love me. You spoke of my love. Oh, it 's that, it 's that which I 'm defending. What does all the rest matter? But I 'm afraid, you see, I 'm afraid that a commonplace life will force you away from me. I 'm a little, frivolous, useless creature — an unnatural hothouse flower. And if I did n't appeal to you any more — if my beauty, left to depend only on itself, did n't attract you any more! And I want you to love me, Silvio, as you have loved me until now —

SILVIO (*releasing himself*)

Oh, go away, go away! You 're a poor little lady!

FLORA (*imperiously*)

Very well. You don't care to understand? If so you have no right to impose your decisions on me.

SILVIO

Yea, verily! Only last evening you said you married me because I was rich.

FLORA

I said nothing of the sort.

SILVIO

Not in that crass way, of course. But when Edoardo — ah — he was the man for you!

FLORA

Have you gone crazy?

SILVIO

And it 's on his account that your heart bleeds at the idea of leaving Milan, is n't it?

FLORA

You 're crazy! You 're crazy!

SILVIO

It 's the most natural thing in the world that you two should get along well together.

FLORA

Indeed? I sent him about his business just a moment ago.

SILVIO

When?

FLORA

Think of what you 're about to do, Silvio. Don't tell your father.

SILVIO

When did you send him about his business?

FLORA

Don't let us talk about other people. Let us talk about ourselves.

SILVIO

When? Answer me.

FLORA

A moment ago. He wanted to explain what he did this morning.

SILVIO (*sneeringly*)

Ah!

FLORA

I told him that if they were explanations which I could repeat to you — And at that point your father called him. He insisted that he would come back later; and I told him that I should not receive him.

SILVIO

He was paid. That 's the explanation. Do you doubt it?

FLORA

No. And I don't care whether he was or not. What does it matter to me? Do you think that I can put my mind on Edoardo's affairs at such a time?

SILVIO

Your mind is on something else, is it? What 's troubling you now? You 're wondering how you 're going to be supported. You 're a poor little lady. As for my right to impose upon you the conditions of life which I accept for myself — we 'll have to decide about that later. I realize that I 've lost you, but I don't want to see you walk straight into the jaws of ruin. Go and pack your trunks. Tomorrow morning we 'll leave together.

[*Flora rises and goes resolutely into her own apartments.*

SILVIO (*rings the bell; Ambrogio enters*)

Ask my father if he 's ready to see me now.

[*Ambrogio goes into Cesare's apartments. Cesare comes out, followed by Ambrogio, who passes out through the dining-room.*

SILVIO (*as soon as Cesare has entered*)

I want you to forgive me for what I said a little while ago and for the way in which I said it.

CESARE

You were forgiven while you were saying it, my poor boy. (*Pause*) I wanted to spare you this interview. It 's as painful for me as it is for you. We were not prepared for this. Since you have been able to reason, you and I have never exchanged a word without agreeing with each other tacitly beforehand. But it seems that the day of discord has come. You have in your mind something that you don't want to speak out. I have a presentiment that it 's something that I 'll not be able to understand. And it has to do with me. This morning, just before you went out, you turned back and put your hands on my shoulders

and looked me full in the face. And you did it all impetuously and at the same time resolutely, like a man who is forcibly repressing some ugly thought. At the moment I thought nothing of it, but it kept coming back into my mind. Later, when you were sitting in this room alone and apparently in deep trouble, I came up to you, and you gave me a look full of absolute anguish.

SILVIO

It 's true. I had just received the worst blow of my life.

CESARE

Full of absolute anguish — and question. And then you hung your head like a man condemned to death. It 's some misunderstanding between us. We must clear it up at once. Let us try to reason together quietly. And first of all let us simplify matters by getting rid of that new development, your going away. Have you really been called to Rome?

SILVIO

I really received the order for those portraits.

CESARE

But not today.

SILVIO

Not today. It has been understood for some time. I had decided on the beginning of Lent.

CESARE

If Edoardo had not interfered in your affair with Fausto Lamias, would you have left just the same?

SILVIO

It 's true that Edoardo's despicable act —

CESARE

Don't speak of it like that. Edoardo has refuted an insult that you yourself were about to refute.

SILVIO

It was my duty and my right.

CESARE

But if you had been in Rome, it would have been his duty and right. You see that he, too, might reasonably feel resentment.

SILVIO

A man who resents an insult does not bargain for settlement, and having failed in that, he does n't do a dirty piece of business by selling it. If he 's able to traffic in it, it 's a sign that it does n't hurt him much.

CESARE

Well, well, we 're not here to discuss Edoardo.

SILVIO

It was you who mentioned him; so let us discuss him a little more. Do you know what everybody is saying? They 're saying that his insult to young Lamias was agreed upon between you and him this morning.

CESARE

It 's a scandalous lie!

SILVIO

Appearances —

CESARE

Edoardo saw that I was dismayed at the idea of a duel between you and young Lamias and found his own way of putting himself in your place. It 's ridiculous to think that I knew his plan beforehand.

But I admit that when I heard of what he had done, it lifted a great weight from my breast.

SILVIO

Please don't say so.

CESARE

Why not? I was n't looking for any reparation. The contumelies of the desperate can't annoy me. A man who 's in the fire screams; it 's the only solace he has. But if reparation had to be sought, I preferred it to be of a sort that could n't turn into loss for me. Edoardo is a stronger man than you and runs no risk. I could think of nothing but to keep you safe.

SILVIO

Just as, throughout my whole life, you 've thought of nothing but to keep me rich.

CESARE

Do you complain of that?

SILVIO

Let 's stop this, father! Let 's stop this! Why go on? We 'll never come to an understanding. If you insist on questioning me, I can't find it in me to beat about the bush with evasive answers. I don't want to talk about it! I can't talk about it! What can I do? I look at you there, and my whole life comes up before me, all shielded as it has been by your love. I see it at its different stages, and at every stage I discover proofs of your love and care. Why have n't we always lived together? In our long intimacy there would surely have occurred some disagreement that might help to modify my affection. But I 've never known anything but kindness from you. How is this sort of talk

possible between you and me? Let us put between us nothing worse than silence. Let me go! Let me go!

CESARE

You judge your father?

SILVIO

I don't judge you. But the facts weigh me down. I separate you from the facts.

CESARE

What facts do you mean? I want no indulgence from you or anyone else! What do you accuse me of? What have you heard about me? Out with it!

SILVIO

I have seen your three letters to Isidoro Lamias.

CESARE

Which letters?

SILVIO

The ones in which you enter into an agreement with him.

CESARE

That 's a matter of business. What have you to do with it?

SILVIO

I 've lived upon it up to the present time.

CESARE

All the more reason for you to return thanks! All you have to do with business is to profit by it and not to appraise it or conduct it. What do you know about business? How did you learn anything about it? By travelling around the world like a prince? By painting pictures? By reading pleasant books and enjoying all the exquisite sensations

that make a man delicate and refined? I 've been plugging along at business for forty years; and now you come and set yourself up as a judge!

SILVIO

There is only one standard of right conduct.

CESARE

Not at all! You, for instance, are accountable to nobody for the management of your household affairs. I, however, have to lay down my books in the court; and they have a right to fine-tooth-comb even my domestic expenses. Business is business. There is a special code of laws which governs it. The great, ever-present factor in business is struggle. If I don't come out on top, somebody else does. Am I to lie down and let the other man walk over me? Would you rather have me do that? Would it be more honest? You 're quite aware, of course, that sentimental rhetoric cultivates flowers of disdainful eloquence against financiers. You gave vent to a nice little collection of them yourself last evening, when you were speaking of Falba, whom they were trying to blackball at the club. But nobody thought of blackballing him because he 's an old satyr who has tortured his wife to death and besmirched his daughters with scandal. In a case like that, where the law makes no provision, I could understand your applying your own standards. But what do you do? You howl vituperations at him because he 's a financier! Very well, he is. And so am I. I 've had dealings with him a dozen times.

SILVIO

You?

CESARE

Yes, I. And I have reason to congratulate myself. He 's a clever fellow.

SILVIO

So —

CESARE

Don't interrupt me; I have n't finished. I 'd like to see what sort of a figure your scruples would cut in the stock market between twelve and two! Where there 's a man who wins, there 's one who loses. Money does n't hang from the trees like apples. To get into my safe, it has to come out of other safes, which same safes were straining their jaws in the hope of swallowing up mine. They 're all alike. But you say I deceive them. They had their eyes open. A man who wants to buy below value and sell above it — and all business may be reduced to those terms — must know the actual value and lie about it skilfully on two occasions. He must lie about it when he buys and lie about it again when he sells. Honesty! Take that word as your working motto and see how you 'll get along! You 'll roll into the first ditch and have the consolation of being known as an honest man. Where distrust is a virtue, honesty is a weakness. The nobility of old days, those refined custodians of loyalty and honor, reserved for themselves one single form of traffic, namely, the traffic in horses. And in connection with the traffic in horses, the cheapest tricks were considered lawful and even desirable. And so it is to this day. The Duke of Ronci, a descendant of the Crusaders, sold me as a sorrel a horse that had been dyed yellow — and at a high price, too. And

he bragged about it at the club, where your refined friends still consider it a good joke. But there 's a limit, say the fastidious. Where is it? Who has fixed it? An approximate honesty is a queer sort of honesty! That fluctuating moral code does n't suit me. I want exactness. Everything is right that does not come under the ban of the law.

SILVIO

Even breaking your promise?

CESARE

Oh, have you got back to that? I 've talked to you in general terms because, although I 'm not afraid to show myself as I am, I don't care to stoop to defending myself against the imputations of my son. But if you like, we 'll let pride enter into it. Pride — with you! They showed you my letters to Lamias? Very well, I can show you some letters that Lamias himself wrote ten years ago, identical with mine and having the same outcome. When you live among wolves you learn how to bite.

SILVIO

And that is your defence! The guilt of someone else!

CESARE

Exactly. All social usages have that same origin.

SILVIO

No, no, no! I don't know how to express it, but what you say can't be true. Right conduct is its own model. I feel sure that you 've known a hundred men of business who don't think as you do.

CESARE

But eighty of them are under bond. Would you have me follow them?

SILVIO

It would be a thousand times better.

CESARE

Why, son, you 're crazy!

SILVIO

You ought to have brought me up with you and educated me to your own principles. Then we should n't be going through this torture. Why did you let me get so far away from you? Why did you let me grow up in a world which knows nothing about your formidable logic of gain? You ought to have hammered it into me in our everyday intercourse, so that I could find it a part of myself — something that had been with me from the beginning. If you had done that, what you 're saying now would n't strike me in the face like an unexpected enemy. You 've made honesty and honor so easy for me. You 've given me such absolute conceptions of them. You taught me nothing but the beautiful and noble things of life and hid all the ugliness.

CESARE

I was keeping that for myself. I wore myself out so that you could be free from it.

SILVIO

Poor father! You have disarmed me; and now it knocks me over with one blow.

CESARE

I 've worked like a porter for forty years. In a world full of tempting pleasures easy to obtain, I 've lived a sober and continent life. I 've helped my relatives. Your mother can tell you that I 've always been generous in relieving the unfortunate. Look my life over. I lay it out before you and

recognize your fitness to judge it. But business is not life; it 's an instrument of life — an instrument which does not belong to you. If I 've become callous by using it, I 'm at least more sincere than the others when I admit its harshness. Have I mistaken my calling? I think not. But even if I have, that concerns nobody but myself. Have I not lived in public esteem up to the present time? Who asks you to render an account of my doings? Wealth is like the water of the sea — nobody takes account of the rivers that feed it.

SILVIO

If one is willing to enjoy wealth, one should be able to answer for its origin.

CESARE

I don't insist on that from you.

SILVIO

Of course, before the world I 'll always be on your side.

CESARE

You 're too kind! I don't care anything about the world. I care about you.

SILVIO

My love for you has n't changed; it has grown perhaps.

CESARE

Out of pity! I don't want any of it. Let 's come to the point. What do you intend to do?

SILVIO

From now on I intend to look out for myself.

CESARE

You mean?

SILVIO

I 've made myself a name in the world of art. I can easily live by my work.

CESARE

You renounce me?

SILVIO

I don't renounce you. You 've lived by your work. I want to follow your example.

CESARE

I 've lived by you. And you knock down my whole life by a single blow. You 've nothing to say? You have decided, have you? You reject my money — which dishonors you! Yes, yes, that 's what it amounts to. And you must tell me so to my face! To my face you must tell me! You 've been able to think it. Well then, the worst is done. I 'd like to hear how those words sound on your lips. Say it, Silvio, "Which dishonors you!" A pure mind like yours should disdain quibbling reservations. — But your very purity, you must know, is the fruit of my money. You can't get away from it — it 's like leprosy. Everything: pride, austerity, ingratitude, everything has come from it. You were made out of my money. Change yourself if you can.

SILVIO

It 's true. What I am is your work. And I 'll always be grateful to you for it as for the greatest gift I could receive.

CESARE

Don't speak about gratitude. For whom did I stick to my galley? Have I myself ever got any enjoyment out of my wealth? I 'm a man of few and

simple wants. As a boy I carried wood for the stoves of the bank where my father was an errand boy before me. If you had n't been born, do you think I should have gone to work to pile up millions? What could I have done with the money? What do I do with it now? What shall I do with it if you refuse it?

SILVIO

You wanted to make me happy, did you not? Listen to me. You wanted to make me happy. Very well, don't try to refuse me happiness now. I want to receive it from you with your full consent. I 'm like you. I was cut out of the same rough, harsh grain as you. You 've given me the best part of yourself. Let me act as you would act if you were following your own natural bent. The main interest of your life has been to persevere doggedly at a long, hard task. Why should you, in turn, try to prevent me from doing the same? The greatest gift that a father can give his son — the only legitimate gift — is to prepare him for life and throw him into life. I don't disdain wealth, but I want to make it for myself. To a man who receives it from another it is a sinister, motionless goddess who rules and humiliates him until he becomes nothing better than a watchman. He who creates it can scatter it lightly about the world as if it were seed. He feels that it 's his — born of him — and he exults in the consciousness of being able to renew it every day. Look around you. The only rich people who are generous in a useful way are the creators of riches.

CESARE

These fine truths have come late to illuminate your

soul. You did n't see them until the sight of them meant separation from your father.

SILVIO

When an immense grief opened my eyes, I found them within myself.

CESARE

Together with my condemnation! I can't pretend that I consent to an act which so roughly overthrows all my work. That would be the confession of a wrong-doing which I don't recognize. Go if you must. My door is open to you to go out and open to you to come in again whenever you like. Live by your own efforts — it won't be for long — and afterwards by mine. And take care! I can read in your eyes. If I have ever known you at all, I know you now. You said it yourself. You 're of my breed; you 're hard as steel. — But I 'll overcome you. You think it 's an easy thing to shake off the yoke of wealth. Forty years I 've worked to pile it up. Ah, ah, long labors produce lasting results. You 've been married for two years — you have no children — but you were born to me five years after my marriage. I bequeath my money to those who are yet to be born. There! Get away from that if you can! I fasten it to your wrists like a chain, and you 'll have to drag it like a galley slave!

SILVIO

Why think about things so far off? And don't let us part with hard and bitter words. Let us be what we 've always been in the past: a father and son who adore each other and are ready to give their lives for each other. That 's what we are.

CESARE

I could give a good deal more than my life for you.

SILVIO

We 'll see each other every year at the Lake.

CESARE

Yes. In your mother's house.

SILVIO

You 'll come to Rome —

CESARE

To your house! Still neutral territory! (*A long silence; he rises*) We 've no more to say to each other, have we?

SILVIO

No more than what 's already been said.

[*They stand and look at each other a moment with sorrowful tenderness. Silvio makes a movement as if to embrace his father.*

CESARE (*gently repulsing him*)

No, no, no. Oh, no. Oh, no. (*He goes with heavy steps toward his own apartments*)

SILVIO (*with emotion, restraining his tears*)

If it could be kept from mother —

CESARE

I 've never kept anything from your mother, or your mother from me. And I won't keep this. But it will be after you leave. This evening we must all be on good terms together.

[*He has pulled himself together and walks with firm steps into his apartments. Silvio goes slowly into his apartments. The stage remains empty for a moment. Edoardo enters cautiously through the outer door. Silvio returns hurriedly.*

SILVIO

Ah, I thought so. You were n't looking for me, were you? You came to see Flora, to give her an explanation of your act of prowess this morning. Give your explanation to me.

EDOARDO

Quite a different matter. You must know, my dear Silvio, that when a man asks me why I did thus and so, I 'm in the habit of answering: "Because I wanted to."

SILVIO

And suppose I throw the question in your face?

EDOARDO

I 've yet to find the man who would dare to do it.

SILVIO (*going up to him*)

You traffic in honor! Do you understand? You traffic in honor! Shall I have to tell you so in the open street?

EDOARDO (*listens with an appearance of haughty impassiveness*) You are protected by your father.

SILVIO

Not at all! What does relationship matter? Let us two get it over once for all! Will you? You don't answer! (*Struck with a sudden idea*) Ah, you 're afraid!

[*Edoardo smiles.*

SILVIO

You 're not afraid of weapons. No. With weapons you have a professional skill. Indeed, you have! That 's the way you pay your debts! But you 're afraid of my father. It 's my father's money that protects me! You know only too well that if you touch a hair of my head, my father will cast you

off and leave you a beggar. And you 're the kind of man who can throw away his life in a minute, but who can't drag it out in poverty year after year. That 's it! And now you 're going to have the best of the bargain. I leave you the field — and the treasury! Get in and wallow as long as you can. It 's the only favor you can do me.

EDOARDO

You know that this house is sacred to me. I can't answer you. (*Goes out haughtily*)

SILVIO (*laughing*)

Ah ha, ha! Sacred to him! Sacred to him! (*Following him*) Go and fight your duel! Hero!

CURTAIN

LIKE FALLING LEAVES

(Come le Foglie)

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

1900

PERSONS

GIOVANNI ROSANI, *fifty-six years old*
GIULIA, *his second wife, thirty-four years old*
TOMMY, *twenty-seven years old* } *Children of Giovanni*
NENNELE, *twenty-two years old* } *by his first wife*
SIGNORA LAURI
SIGNORA IRENE
MME. LABLANCHE, *a dressmaker*
HELMER STRILE, *an artist*
AN OLD ARTIST
A GENTLEMAN
ANDREA } *servants*
GASPARE }
LUCIA, *an old servant*
MARTA, *a cook*
A GROOM
SEVERAL PORTERS

LIKE FALLING LEAVES

THE FIRST ACT

A sumptuous drawing-room which opens by sliding doors into a still more sumptuous dining-room. The latter is furnished in carved walnut and hung with stamped leather in a design of large gold flowers on a dark background. The ceiling of the drawing-room has gilded panels and the walls are covered with tapestry. It is elegantly furnished after the English fashion. The large dining-room table is covered with articles of baggage, shawl-straps, umbrellas, etc. There is no bric-à-brac about the rooms. It is apparent that the family is about to leave the house for good. At the right, two doors: the first leads into Giovanni's room, the second into Tommy's. At the left, in the rear, a door leading to the outside. Near the front a door which looks into Giulia's room. The dining-room has a single door in the corner to the right of the audience.

As the curtain rises, three porters loaded with trunks come from the dining-room and go out by the outer door. In the dining-room Lucia comes and goes with odds and ends that she puts down on the table. Nennele in the drawing-room, standing beside a pier table, is noting down the various articles of baggage on a sheet of paper. A violent and impatient ringing is heard from time to time.

NENNELE (*to the porters*)

How many are there?

A PORTER

Six downstairs and three here. Nine. (*They go out*)

NENNELE

Lucia.

LUCIA

Yes, miss.

NENNELE

How many valises are there still to come?

LUCIA

Three of the mistress's and two of the young gentleman's.

NENNELE

Are they ready?

LUCIA

I have just closed the mistress's last one. I don't know about the young gentleman's.

NENNELE

When Aunt Irene comes, you must call father at once.

LUCIA

Yes, miss.

NENNELE

Where is father?

LUCIA

I don't know. He has been wandering about the house all morning. He comes and goes and can't stay still a moment. I went into his room an hour ago to take him the mail, and he was standing in front of the mirror drumming on the glass with his

fingers. Then he went down to the stables. Then he came up here again. Have n't you seen him yet?

NENNELE

Oh yes. As soon as I was up I went in to bid him good morning.

LUCIA

And just to think that he had his valise locked at five o'clock! And he helped Andrea to take it downstairs. He knew perfectly well that the porters were coming. I wanted to do it for him, but he would n't let me. He said: "Don't bother me; I like the exercise." (*Pause, then almost in tears*) Ah, Miss Nennele, to think that before an hour has passed —

NENNELE

Hush, hush! (*Insistent ringing of the bell*) Who in the world is ringing like that?

LUCIA

It must be the young gentleman.

TOMMY (*appears in the doorway of his room; he wears knickerbockers and stockings of fine wool in tourist style; he is in his shirt sleeves*) Gaspare! Where 's Gaspare?

LUCIA

He 's downstairs to help with the loading.

TOMMY

I 've been calling him for half an hour. Tell him to come up and help me dress.

NENNELE

Father told him to go. Can't you dress yourself?

TOMMY

Oh yes, if I have to; but it 's an awful bore at such an hour.

NENNELE

It 's half past nine. I dressed myself without help at six.

TOMMY

I congratulate you. (*To Lucia*) All right. Don't bother calling him.

GIULIA (*calls from her room*)

Lucia.

LUCIA

I 'm coming. (*Enters Giulia's room*)

NENNELE

Are your things strapped up?

TOMMY

Yes, O model of virtue. The big trunk is strapped. Gaspare was just about to close the little one when they called him away. I tried to close it myself, but it was too much like work. The tub won't go in.

NENNELE

Leave it then. What 's the difference?

TOMMY

Fine! I won't take any baths in Switzerland. Who said "poor but clean"? (*He begins to tie his necktie*)

NENNELE

Let me do it. (*Ties it for him*) Oh, Tommy, this is all the valet and chambermaid you 'll have from now on.

TOMMY

To tell the truth, don't you enjoy the prospect of a coarse and common existence?

NENNELE

No; but I 'm not dying of grief.

TOMMY

Quite right. These are the heroic resolutions of the first moment. But you 'll see. We 're all busy showing what we 're made of now — but wait till later, when it begins to get stale.

[*Lucia passes from Giulia's room toward the outer door.*

NENNELE

Are you going downstairs?

LUCIA

I am going to take out these notes for the mistress.

NENNELE

To the post-office?

LUCIA

No, to their addresses.

NENNELE

Now?

LUCIA

The mistress told me to take a cab.

NENNELE

Very well. Go along.

[*Lucia goes out.*

TOMMY

The last farewells go forth. (*Gives a piece of money to Nennele*) For you.

NENNELE

What is it? A gold piece?

TOMMY

A tip. Take it. A little brotherly token.

NENNELE

But how about you?

TOMMY

Oh, don't worry about me. (*He makes a gesture to indicate that he has plenty more*)

NENNELE

In that case, thanks. Now hurry and get dressed. (*Tommy turns to go*) And then come back here and let 's have a little talk together, you and I.

TOMMY

I 'll have to strap up the travelling rugs.

NENNELE

Bring them here and I 'll help you. Will you?

TOMMY

With great pleasure. (*Returns to his room*)

[*The Porters return empty-handed.*

NENNELE (*to the Porters*)

This way. (*Knocks at the door of Giulia's room*)

GUILIA (*from within*)

Who is it?

NENNELE

May the men come in and get the trunks?

GIULIA (*from within*)

Come in, come in.

[*The Porters enter.*

ANDREA (*comes from the back of the dining-room with a bunch of keys; he is not in livery*) These are the keys of our room, the kitchen and the servants' hall.

NENNELE

Have you gone through the servants' quarters? Is there nothing left in them?

ANDREA

Nothing that belongs to the servants. I locked up everything myself.

NENNELE

That 's right. Put the keys there in the big sideboard in the dining-room. The others are in the drawer at the right. Are they properly tagged?

ANDREA

Yes, miss. I 've checked them up. Everything is in order.

NENNELE

That 's good.

ANDREA

Have you any other orders, miss?

NENNELE

No, you may go.

[*The Porters cross with the trunks.*

TOMMY (*brings in a shawl-strap, a Scotch plaid and a light overcoat*) There you are. (*Throws everything on the sofa*) Wait a minute. (*Returns to his room*)

NENNELE

Now don't bring too much stuff.

TOMMY (*from his room*)

Only what I need. (*He reënters with other things, among them two tennis racquets*) That 's all. Now what do you want?

NENNELE

Oh nothing. I just wanted to talk a moment with somebody who understands. With father I have to be cheerful. Mamma is n't our mother! For three hours now I have been giving what seems like funeral directions. I feel as if I were burying our home. And more than that, more than that!

TOMMY

You have a perfect genius for melancholy.

NENNELE

Not at all. It would take more than this to really discourage me. But I feel sad — a little. I have left my room never to enter it again. I closed the windows and barred the shutters and made it so dark that I could scarcely see the way out. Just as I was about to leave a sort of fear came over me. It seemed to me that I saw myself dead on the bed. It was all my youth that was dead, the flower of my life.

TOMMY (*lighting a cigarette*)

Poor Nennele!

NENNELE

Other people will go into it. Everything will be different — the walls, the furniture, the curtains. Do you know what I wrote on the wall beside the window? I wrote: "Whoever you are that occupy this room, may you be unhappy in it. Nennele."

TOMMY

Then the house has no chance to find a buyer.

NENNELE

What? You really think — (*She opens the shawl-strap and spreads it out on the table*)

TOMMY (*smiling*)

No, no, no. Don't let that worry you. I should be only too glad to go into a room bewitched by you. Poor Nanni, Nenne, Nennele! So young and so vindictive! Don't you realize that you ought n't to set so much store by worldly goods?

NENNELE

Oh, but you know, I 'm not at all afraid of poverty.

TOMMY

Of course. Not a bit!

NENNELE

Honestly, I 'm not. Listen. I have already told father. (*Folds the overcoat*) I will give lessons in English. There must be plenty of pupils in Geneva.

TOMMY

The other way! No, no, no! The sleeves should be folded inside. (*Folds the sleeves*) There! And I will give lessons in tennis. Lay them on top of the tails now —

NENNELE

This way?

TOMMY

Yes. The Lord help you if you spoil that overcoat for me. It 's a London model. And mamma will portray Lake Leman and the Castle of Chillon in water colors. Sales assured.

NENNELE

She laid in a supply of paints yesterday.

TOMMY

Money well spent.

NENNELE

The dealer came this morning to get that well-spent money.

TOMMY

What? Had n't she paid?

NENNELE

No. But he discovered that we were going away — they all know it now — and came down on us like a thunderbolt.

TOMMY

And what said mamma?

NENNELE

She was locked in her room. I had to talk to her through the door. She said that she had intended to send the money before we left. But the dealer kept on fussing around, so I paid him eighty *lire*.

TOMMY

You did?

NENNELE

And I gave another eighty *lire* to the glove-maker and sixty to the perfumer, all for things she has bought just recently. Now I have hardly any money left except your gold piece. If any more duns come they 'll have to be sent to father.

TOMMY

Why yes. All the same, you did right. Father must be short of money just now.

NENNELE

He especially asked that all the bills be sent in early, because he did n't want to leave any dragging along.

TOMMY

Why, to be sure. The little debts have to be paid.

NENNELE

The little ones, and the big ones, too.

TOMMY

Of course. I only meant that the little ones cry out with a louder voice.

NENNELE

That 's so. Those people looked me over with such distrust! They stared at this furniture, this luxury, with such ironical looks! You know, nobody believes that we are really ruined.

TOMMY

No?

NENNELE (*takes the racquet case in her hand*)

You 're going to take the racquets along?

TOMMY

I should say I was.

NENNELE

What for?

TOMMY

Why, don't you know that Geneva is one of my fields of glory? I am an honorary member of the Helvetic Club. I carried off the international prize for tennis there two years ago.

NENNELE

It was different then. (*She begins to pack the racquet case*)

TOMMY

What is different? We are not quite so rich, that 's all. What are you doing?

NENNELE

I 'm packing the racquets.

TOMMY

They go outside under the straps so that they can be seen.

NENNELE

Then even you don't believe that we are really ruined.

TOMMY

It 's a matter of interpretation.

NENNELE

That dealer in paints said that millions are covered with pitch, so that they stick to the hands that they pass through. And he meant it as an insult.

TOMMY

But what harm is there in that?

NENNELE

In that case our poverty would be only make-believe. If there is n't any harm in it, why put up a pretence?

TOMMY

I suppose you see before you black poverty, the garret, the straw pallet, and the kind lady suitably attired for charity-visiting, who will come and bring one woollen blanket for the whole family.

NENNELE

Yesterday Lucia begged father to take her with us. She said she did n't want any wages. Father thanked her with his eyes full of tears — I was there and saw it — and he told her that our means would not permit him to take her along.

TOMMY

I 'm afraid those things are part of the game.

NENNELE

You think it 's all a pretence then?

TOMMY

How can I put it so that you 'll get my meaning? You can't compare the attitude toward life of people like us, who have never known anything but the exquisite and the beautiful, with that of a man who for forty years has worked hard from morning till night. Our feelings have the elevation of uselessness. We represent a superior humanity. Neither you nor I have anything to do with sordid reality.

NENNELE

And yet you are quite willing to accept the good things of reality.

TOMMY

I 'll take what comes my way.

NENNELE

You make me fairly long for poverty.

TOMMY

A matter of personal taste. As for our affairs, I assure you that I know nothing about them.

NENNELE

Well, then, don't think evil.

TOMMY

You don't want me to think evil? It 's done. I don't think evil.

NENNELE

It 's impossible to talk seriously with you. Help me to fasten the straps.

TOMMY

Poor Lucia! And she wanted to come without wages!

NENNELE

She 's the only one I dare be at all familiar with. The men servants overawe me when they are dressed like other people.

TOMMY

They don't me. Gaspare came into my room this morning arrayed in a plaid smoking-jacket that I used to wear last year — and with tan shoes! Have you seen him?

NENNELE

I did n't especially notice him.

TOMMY

He gave quite the effect of a gentleman, clean-shaven as he is —

NENNELE

He has all the essentials.

TOMMY

He certainly has a more distinguished air than our cousin, Massino, otherwise known as "The Saviour."

NENNELE

That 's not saying a great deal.

TOMMY

To think that there in Switzerland we 'll always have him under our feet!

NENNELE

Worse than that. I 'm afraid it 's we who will be under his feet.

TOMMY

And he so handsomely shod! Do you remember those wonderful boots of his?

NENNELE

And what a waistcoat! He thought he was making an impression, you know.

TOMMY

He 's unprejudiced.

NENNELE

He 's determined.

TOMMY

He 's enterprising.

NENNELE

He 's smug.

TOMMY

And he will want to marry you.

NENNELE

He won't do it, though.

TOMMY

Think of his offering his own uncle a salary of two hundred and fifty *lire* a month!

NENNELE

I can't understand how father came to accept it.

TOMMY

But I 'll be there to help things along.

NENNELE

O Tommy, it 's lucky that I have you around. I was in the depths and you 've quite cheered me up again.

TOMMY

That 's my business in life.

[*Gaspare enters from the outer door dressed in a plaid smoking-jacket.*

NENNELE

Here 's Gaspare.

TOMMY

Blessed is he who beholds him!

GASPARE

I was in the courtyard.

TOMMY (*to Nennele*)

Look and see if he is n't a perfect gentleman.

GASPARE

Have you any orders for me?

TOMMY

Why, if I 'm not mistaken, there is still the tub to be got into my trunk.

GASPARE

I will attend to it at once.

TOMMY

If you will have the kindness.

[*Gaspare goes into Tommy's room.*

NENNELE (*to Tommy, who is following Gaspare*)

You carried it off beautifully, but I noticed that you did n't venture on any familiarities.

TOMMY

I was afraid he might return them. (*He goes out*)

ANDREA (*entering*)

Miss Nennele, Madame Lablanche is here.

NENNELE

The dressmaker! What can she want?

ANDREA

She asked for the mistress. She has a little girl with a box with her.

NENNELE

O Heavens! Did n't you explain to her?

ANDREA

I told her, but she insists.

NENNELE

See if father is in his room.

ANDREA

He is n't there. I saw him just now talking to the gardener. Shall I call him?

NENNELE

No, no. Where is he?

ANDREA

In the greenhouse.

NENNELE

Show her in.

[*Andrea obeys. Mme. Lablanche enters. The little girl puts down the box on a chair near the door and remains in the background.*

NENNELE (*to Andrea*)

Go and tell your mistress.

[*Andrea goes out.*

MME. LABLANCHE

Good morning, Mademoiselle.

NENNELE

Good morning. My mother will be here in a moment. (*Goes into the dining-room*)

GIULIA (*comes from her room dressed in a very beautiful travelling costume*) We are just on the point of leaving the city, Madame Lablanche.

MME. LABLANCHE

Signora Altrovino told me so last evening. I at once set about finishing Madame's dress. My girls worked all night.

GIULIA

Thanks. But it was not pressing. Indeed, I was just writing to you about it. A sudden death in the family —

MME. LABLANCHE

Oh, I am very sorry!

GIULIA

And I intended to ask you if you could n't possibly make some other disposal of the dress.

MME. LABLANCHE

If Madame had only told me two or three days ago.

GIULIA

I admit I ought to have done so, but it slipped my mind. However, to return to our business. I could n't even manage at this late hour to take the dress away with me. I did not expect it so soon.

MME. LABLANCHE

Yes, but as I would not have found Madame here later —

GIULIA

Very well, you will send it to me then.

MME. LABLANCHE

As Madame pleases. (*To the girl*) You may go. (*The girl starts to go away, leaving the box*) No, take it. (*The girl goes out with the box*)

GIULIA

I will send you the address.

MME. LABLANCHE

There is another small account.

GIULIA

Send it to me along with the dress.

MME. LABLANCHE

I am very sorry to have to insist, but I cannot possibly wait.

[*Nennele goes out resolutely through the door in the rear of the dining-room.*

GIULIA

At such a — time —

MME. LABLANCHE

It is not a large sum; thirteen hundred *lire.*

GIULIA

But we are just on the point of leaving! It 's an unheard-of thing! Besides, it 's a quarterly account. And I have never caused you to lose a penny.

MME. LABLANCHE

That is perfectly true; but I should not like to begin now. Madame is quite aware that she is not going away on a pleasure trip or for a visit to the country. Madame's husband has had a meeting of his creditors. If I had known of it in time I should have been present. I knew nothing about it, however, until last evening. I am a business woman. I have a family. I must look after my own interests. If

Madame prefers that I should apply to her husband —

GIULIA

No, no, no.

MME. LABLANCHE

A little embarrassment soon passes off.

GIULIA

No, no. (*Goes toward her own room, then comes back and goes to Tommy's door*) Tommy, may I come in?

TOMMY (*from his room*)

Just a minute. I 'll be out right away.

GIULIA (*to Mme. Lablanche*)

Suppose we make it a thousand — if you keep the dress.

MME. LABLANCHE

Eleven hundred then.

GIULIA

A hundred off for cash.

MME. LABLANCHE

But I have already taken off a hundred.

GIULIA

I will give you a thousand *lire*, not a penny more.

[*Tommy enters. Giulia takes him aside.*

GIULIA

Give me five hundred *lire*. I know you have it. It 's a bill that I forgot to pass on to your father. It would be too bad to tell him about it now. It 's for a thousand *lire*. I have the other five hundred.

TOMMY

Have n't you any more?

GIULIA

It 's all I can do to scrape up the five hundred.

TOMMY (*smiling incredulously*)

Mamma!

GIULIA

Where should I get money? Don't leave me in this awkward position.

TOMMY

I wager that you have a nice little pile laid aside somewhere.

GIULIA

No, as true as I 'm standing here. Be a good fellow now; let me have it.

TOMMY

Get out your own five hundred.

GIULIA

Oh, thanks; I 'll go and get it. (*She runs to her room*)

[*Tommy whistles softly under his breath, shifting from one foot to the other. Then looks at Mme. Lablanche.*

TOMMY

Um — well dressed. (*Takes out a cigarette and lights it*) Is it you who make the dresses of La Ricchetti?

MME. LABLANCHE

The singer? Yes, sir.

TOMMY

I congratulate you. Last night she had on a flower costume that was a dream.

MME. LABLANCHE

Of mauve silk?

TOMMY

That 's the one.

MME. LABLANCHE

She is such a beautiful creature!

TOMMY

Eighteen inches around the waist.

MME. LABLANCHE

One might think that you helped her to dress.

TOMMY

I? Not at all. In fact — quite the contrary.

[*Giulia returns a little embarrassed with a bill for a thousand lire which she tries to hide.*

GIULIA (*to Tommy*)

Here, give it to me.

TOMMY

Oh, you 'll have to give me change. I 've nothing smaller than a thousand.

GIULIA (*annoyed*)

No?

TOMMY

It 's true. And I don't trust my step-mother. Give me the change and here you are.

GIULIA (*embarrassed*)

The fact is — I can't —

TOMMY (*smiling*)

You too? O you miser! You have a bill for a thousand, too? As I 'm alive! Well, then, pay with yours now. As soon as I 've broken mine I 'll give you my half.

GIULIA

On your word of honor?

TOMMY

On my word as a gentleman.

GIULIA (*to Mme. Lablanche*)

Here is the money, Mme. Lablanche.

MME. LABLANCHE

Thank you. Where may I write the receipt?

GIULIA (*looking around at the bare furniture*)

There seems to be no place.

TOMMY

Here, on the pier table.

MME. LABLANCHE (*writes the receipt and then hands it to Giulia*) Here it is, Madame. I have done as you wished.

GIOVANNI (*entering from the outside, to Mme. Lablanche*) I beg your pardon if I have kept you waiting. You have a bill for me?

MME. LABLANCHE

I have just signed the receipt.

GIOVANNI

Ah, very well.

MME. LABLANCHE

A pleasant journey, Madame.

GIULIA

Till I see you again.

[*Mme. Lablanche goes out.*

GIOVANNI (*to Giulia*)

Yesterday you asked me for eighty *lire* to buy paints with. I begged you not to spend any more money. I told you that my money was all accounted for. You insisted and swore to me that you did n't have a penny. I was so humiliated! But you kept on insisting until I gave you the money.

TOMMY (*aside*)

Hello!

GIOVANNI

How much did that bill amount to?

GIULIA

Oh, it was very small.

GIOVANNI

Let me see it.

GIULIA

I asked Tommy and he let me have the money. I did n't want to disturb you for a trifle.

GIOVANNI

Let me see it. (*Takes the bill and reads it; to Tommy*) You paid a thousand *lire?*

TOMMY

Half of it! Half of it!

GIOVANNI

So you 've got money too.

TOMMY

Was it wrong of me to pay it?

GIOVANNI

Quite the contrary. — The money that my wife has in her possession she has had from me. She has got it by saving on her household expenses. I am sorry to have to deprive her of it, but it really belongs to the house and not to her. You, however, have had nothing from me. I foresaw this failure two months ago. For some time I had been thoroughly disgusted with your idle life and my purse was closed to you. Therefore, it was your own money, and I am glad to be able to repay you.

TOMMY

Oh, father!

GIOVANNI

I want you to take it. (*He lays a bill on the table*) And if it hurts you to take it, it will have served a

good purpose. Keep it. Who knows but perhaps some day! —

TOMMY

I 've had luck at cards. I won twelve thousand *lire* last month.

GIOVANNI

I know it. While I was struggling with the terror of failure, you were passing your nights in the gambling-houses.

TOMMY

In the gambling-houses? At the club!

GIOVANNI

You won eight thousand *lire* in a single night. I was informed of it the next morning. It was the very day I called together my creditors. I sent for you to come to my study. I explained to you the state of my affairs. I did n't want to begin by reproaching you — I did n't want to show you that I knew. I hoped for a generous impulse from you. You did n't say a word. Then my heart seemed to freeze within me. As you are not stingy, I know what you think: you think I have n't made an honest accounting. (*Silence, then a change of tone*) I expect Massimo at any moment. He was to arrive this morning, and he will travel with us. I know that he is not in your good graces, nor in Nennele's. I have already told Nennele what I expect of her; and I tell you, sir, not to give yourself any airs.

TOMMY

As if I had ever —

GIOVANNI

Massimo is a close relative, and he is the only person who has come to my aid in this misfortune. I had

not seen him for years while he spent his life travelling about the world in connection with his work. I did not appeal to him; he came forward of his own accord. But for him, let it be said as an example to you, Tommy, I don't know what would have become of us. — Another thing. We will go by way of Modane because the railroad has given me a pass, as a former director, and so we must go as far as possible by the Italian road. For the same reason, from here to Modane we will travel first class. But I warn you that after we pass Modane the second will have to do. (*To Tommy*) I am sorry for your knickerbockers, but that fine suit is about to see some hard wear and ought to be broken in. We leave here within half an hour. I ask you to be ready on time.

TOMMY

Have you finished? Do you know that you have talked to me as if I were a personal enemy?

GIOVANNI (*impetuously takes Tommy's head between his hands and kisses him on the brow, restraining a sob*) I have seen you grow up in this house. Don't let us break down. Keep your nerve! Keep your nerve! (*He goes hastily to his room, then reappears*) Has my sister come yet?

TOMMY

Aunt Irene? No.

GIOVANNI

When she comes call me at once. (*He goes out*)

GIULIA

We must make allowances for him, because his head is n't all it should be. If he had followed my advice, we should never have got into this fix.

TOMMY

Your advice?

GIULIA

Oh, I know something about money matters. I wanted at least to spare him this expense today.

TOMMY

Yes, you would have spared him — now and forever. If Mme. Lablanche had n't put in an appearance, she would never have seen her money.

GIULIA

She has had enough out of me already! — Remember that the money is still there on the table.

TOMMY

You know perfectly well that it is n't *my* money. I took the scolding for your sake.

GIULIA (*taking the bill*)

What I mean is, that you don't owe me anything now. — What were you thinking now? — I will keep it for all of us. It will be there when you need it.

TOMMY

I 'd hate to have to depend on it.

GIULIA

So you won twelve thousand *lire*. You told me six the other day.

TOMMY

And on the strength of that six you got five hundred out of me. If I had told you twelve you would have asked me for a thousand. And besides, the greater part of it is gone already. I had some debts of my own to pay.

GIULIA

Shame on you!

TOMMY

Shame on me for having paid my debts?

GIULIA

For having gambled.

TOMMY

Just what I expected. Moralizing is cheap.

[*Nennele enters from the back of the dining-room.*

GIULIA

Come here, come here! Was it you who went and called your father, eh?

NENNELE

Yes.

GIULIA

A pretty state of affairs! You 've taken to spying on me!

TOMMY (*placing himself between them; to Nennele*)

Don't answer her.

[*Lucia enters from the outer door with a note and hands it to Giulia, who takes it, opens it, and reads it eagerly.*

TOMMY (*in the meantime, to Nennele*)

You must n't think that I 'm not on your side. I may be a poor specimen, but —

NENNELE

Why do you talk like that?

TOMMY

Because it 's the truth.

GIULIA (*to Lucia*)

Did you deliver my notes yourself?

LUCIA

Count Filippo was still in bed. I gave his to the maid. I met Signor Sarzana on the steps, and he told me that he would be at the station. Don

Michele came out to the anteroom himself to give me this note. He asked what time we intended to leave. He will be at the station, too.

GIULIA

They will bring flowers.

LUCIA

The flowers are here already. The valet came with me.

GIULIA

Then go and fetch them. (*Lucia goes out; Giulia reads the note a second time*)

TOMMY (*softly to Nennele*)

The one thing lacking — flowers for the departure.

NENNELE (*softly to Tommy*)

And for such a departure!

[*Lucia returns with the flowers.*

GIULIA (*taking them*)

Oh, lovely, lovely!

NENNELE

Mamma, is everything in your room ready to be locked up?

GIULIA

Yes, I was just waiting for Lucia. (*Gives the flowers to Nennele*) Here, put them back so that they won't wither. (*Nennele throws them on the sofa*) What do you mean by that?

NENNELE

Where did you want me to put them?

GIULIA (*looks at her; then to Lucia*)

Come with me.

LUCIA (*approaching Nennele affectionately*)

It 's too bad —

GIULIA

Come along. (*Enters her room with Lucia*)

NENNELE

Think of her putting her mind on things like that at such a time.

TOMMY

Oh, we won't die because we 're going to Switzerland.

ANDREA (*from the outer door*)

May I send Gaspare with the baggage to check it?

TOMMY

How about my baggage?

ANDREA

Gaspare had it taken down by the back stairs.

NENNELE

Then he can go.

ANDREA

The young gentleman you were expecting has arrived — your cousin.

NENNELE

Massimo? Where is he?

ANDREA

I just saw him from the window crossing the garden.

NENNELE

Is the carriage here already?

ANDREA

They are just harnessing the horses.

MASSIMO (*from the outer door*)

Good morning.

[*Andrea goes out.*

NENNELE

Oh, Massimo, when did you get here?

MASSIMO

This morning at six, straight from Buda-Pesth. Good morning, Tommaso.

TOMMY

Good old Massimo!

MASSIMO

Are you going too?

TOMMY

Was n't that understood?

MASSIMO

When I went away ten days ago, uncle was still uncertain whether he should come alone or bring you with him. But on seeing the baggage I presume that you were all going.

NENNELE

Too many, eh?

MASSIMO

Not at all! The more the merrier. And uncle?

TOMMY

I will call him. (*Goes to Giovanni's room*) Father, Massimo is here.

MASSIMO (*to Nennele*)

And how is he keeping up? More like himself again?

NENNELE

He 's very calm.

MASSIMO

And you? Are you sorry that you are going away?

NENNELE

I can scarcely wait for the moment to leave.

MASSIMO

That 's no answer. Are you really sorry?

NENNELE

I should not like to stay.

MASSIMO

Another answer that is n't an answer. But we 'll get acquainted in time. We are first cousins; we call each other by our first names; I like you both very much. But since we were born we have been together about two hours in all, a week or so ago.

TOMMY

I remember having seen you when you were twelve years old. You were a long, lanky chap like a bean-pole. I was about ten and Nennele five.

MASSIMO

I don't remember Irene at all.

NENNELE

Nor I you.

MASSIMO

Naturally. But I remember you, Tommaso. I detested you because you had a nicer tie than I.

NENNELE (*looking at him*)

Today you take your revenge.

MASSIMO

In the matter of my tie? I fear that my tie is not at all to your taste.

NENNELE

Why? It goes with all the rest of your suit.

MASSIMO

That means that you disapprove of my whole outfit. But I shan't change it.

TOMMY

It would be a great pity if you did.

GIOVANNI (*comes from his room*)

Massimo!

MASSIMO

Glad to see you, uncle. (*They shake hands*)

GIOVANNI

It makes me feel much better to know that you are here with me. (*To Nennele and Tommy*) Will you children be ready in plenty of time?

TOMMY

Ready and waiting.

GIOVANNI (*to Nennele*)

Go and find mamma. (*Nennele goes to Giulia's room; to Tommy*) And you, go through the house and see that all the rooms are properly closed. Don't lose any time. (*Exit Tommy*)

GIOVANNI

Did you wind up your affairs at Buda-Pesth?

MASSIMO

Very well indeed. I resigned the contract, but with profit.

GIOVANNI

I am very sorry that on my account —

MASSIMO

Better stick to one piece of work than fly like a shuttle between a dozen. — You have compromised with your creditors. I got your telegram.

GIOVANNI

The deficit is eight hundred thousand *lire*. I give up this house, for which I have already had an offer of three hundred and seventy thousand *lire*. The stables, the carriage-house, the furniture, including the tapestries and the library, were appraised at eighty thousand, and the country house at Brianza, that cost me more than half a million, at a hundred thousand. The creditors will take seventy per cent. I keep nothing. I know that Lauri, who was my principal creditor, was so astonished at my remark-

able simplicity that he called me an idiot, openly, on the floor of the Exchange. And another, also a friend of mine and a satisfied creditor, a polished gentleman, speaking of the stubborn industry of my whole life and of my equally stubborn honesty, called me with equal frankness a headstrong mule.

MASSIMO

Refined wit!

GIOVANNI

These are the returns that I have got from the public. At home —

MASSIMO

Exactly. — Your brother-in-law?

GIOVANNI

Oh, I 'm not speaking of him. My brother-in-law, when things were well adjusted, sent my sister to me —

MASSIMO

Aunt Irene. I remember her.

GIOVANNI

To bring me ten thousand *lire.*

MASSIMO (*with a grimace*)

He 's several times a millionaire, is n't he?

GIOVANNI

His fortune is estimated at seven million.

MASSIMO

It 's undoubtedly all of that.

GIOVANNI

He considers that he has done his whole duty. On the other hand, my sister told me yesterday that she intended to come this morning especially to see Nennele, who is her god-daughter. And she made

a great point of saying it. I think that she may give the child a handsome present.

MASSIMO

Did n't she offer to keep your family with her until things were in some sort of shape?

GIOVANNI

Yes. And I almost accepted her offer in order to get more time to look for a house. But since —

MASSIMO

The house is found — that is, if it suits you. My first assistant wired me about it day before yesterday. It 's a Swiss peasant chalet, but one that was formerly the country house of well-to-do people. Two floors, six rooms on each floor. A delightful spot outside of the city; a big lawn in front. The owner has bought a farm in the neighborhood and has gone to live there. My assistant has the refusal of it for six hundred *lire* a year. I will retain two rooms on the ground floor to be used as your office, and for them I will pay a hundred *lire*. That leaves five hundred as your share. What do you think of it?

GIOVANNI

The very thing.

MASSIMO

You understand that I 'm not trying to induce you to leave your family here. Of course, it will be a comfort to you to have them with you from the first.

GIOVANNI

Oh, it is n't that. (*Pause; then sadly*) Do you know why I don't leave them here? I don't — trust them.

MASSIMO

Whom do you not trust?

GIOVANNI

My own family. If you only knew the things that I have seen in my house since the failure! My wife seems to you frivolous and giddy, eh?

MASSIMO

Have I ever intimated —?

GIOVANNI

She brought a lawyer into the house to persuade me to defraud my creditors. She proposed to me to forge deeds — put the property in someone else's name. — She wanted to sell these tapestries secretly. And when I told her that that would mean fraudulent bankruptcy, criminal prosecution, prison, do you know what she answered? She answered: "There will be no time for such things. We will be gone!"

MASSIMO

Well, well!

GIOVANNI

And my son — he believes that what Giulia proposed to me to do has already been done. Oh, he does n't know and does n't judge, you understand. And you may be sure he would never have advised me to do it. But in a vague way he takes it for granted that there is some money laid aside; and he is quite satisfied that it should be so. And it is n't the insult to myself which that implies — what does it matter? It 's that it indicates what sort of stuff he 's made of — that it is a warning of what is to come.

MASSIMO

Oh, you and I will take care of the future.

GIOVANNI

You perhaps. — But I! I have ruined them.

MASSIMO

My father left me without a penny when I was fourteen years old, and I 'm grateful to him for it.

GIOVANNI

I have no authority. I 'm nothing but a draught horse to do the work. You can't imagine the effort that it has cost me to be severe during these days. It can't last. I have never exercised authority; I never saw the need of it. Wealth softens and beautifies everything so! I 'm a bad father, Massimo.

MASSIMO

Fresh air and fresh fields! You 'll see what a difference they will make.

TOMMY (*from the anteroom*)

Why, no — come to be sure. We 'll all be so pleased to see you.

GIOVANNI

And now we have to go through with the leave-takings!

TOMMY (*enters with Signora Lauri*)

Father, Signora Lauri.

SIGNORA LAURI

Just a moment — for a last good-bye!

GIOVANNI

I thank you.

TOMMY (*at Giulia's door*)

Mamma! Nennele!

SIGNORA LAURI

Don't ask me to talk. Don't ask me to talk! It 's so painful! I am losing my best friends. What a thing it is! Those who go away don't mind the parting — but those who stay! I did n't close my eyes all last night. (*Giulia enters*) Giulia, darling! Just two minutes: time to embrace you. (*Embraces her*)

GIULIA

How good you are!

SIGNORA LAURI

And Nennele? (*Nennele enters with Lucia*) Here she is. My love! (*Embraces her*) No words can say what I am losing!

TOMMY

How about me? Have you forgotten that I 'm going too?

SIGNORA LAURI

My hand to you — or rather, both my hands.

[*Tommy kisses her hands one after the other.*

GIOVANNI (*on the opposite side of the stage; to Massimo*) Look at them. Look at my wife. Look at my son. Do they seem to understand the position they are in? You don't know! You don't know! (*He is seated on the sofa, his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands*)

SIGNORA LAURI

Will you pass through St. Gotthard?

GIULIA

No, through Modane.

SIGNORA LAURI

That 's too bad. St. Gotthard is *so* picturesque. (*To Nennele*) Have you ever been in Switzerland?

NENNELE

Never.

MASSIMO (*looks at Giovanni sympathetically*)

Keep up your courage, uncle.

GIOVANNI

You can't understand. I did n't understand either. It 's my fault. But prosperity blinds one. Ah, grace, elegance, breeding, how they cover up things. You 'll see, Massimo. To leave them here would mean that they would follow along the easy path of doubtful pleasures. No, no. They must go with me. And even that may not help.

MASSIMO

Don't talk like that.

GIOVANNI

You 'll see. They are people who can't resist the storm. They have no stamina. At the first puff of wind they 're gone — they 're gone!

[*Andrea enters.*

ANDREA (*to Giovanni*)

The carriage is ready.

GIOVANNI (*rising*)

It 's time to go. (*To Massimo*) She did n't come after all.

[*All get up, put on overcoats and look for umbrellas, canes, etc.*

SIGNORA LAURI

We will come and see you.

TOMMY

Make it a promise. Console the exiles.

SIGNORA LAURI (*to Giovanni*)

To you I say only one thing. You 're a naughty man to take them away from me.

GIULIA

My flowers! Where are my flowers?

[*Lucia hands Nennele her hat and travelling coat.*

NENNELE

How good you are to wait on me, dear Lucia!

[*Lucia tries to kiss her hand, weeping.*

NENNELE

Hush, hush!

IRENE (*enters from the outer door*)

Ah, thank heaven, you 're still here!

GIOVANNI

My sister!

IRENE

I was afraid I would n't get here in time. I would have gone to the station — but I knew that my feelings would be too much for me. My husband will be there. Nennele, I brought you a little chocolate to eat on the train.

MASSIMO

Just look! What a treat! Thank her — thank your aunt. Dear aunt!

IRENE (*taken aback*)

Who is this? Who is this?

GIOVANNI

It 's Massimo, our nephew.

IRENE

Ah, how you have grown!

MASSIMO

Since when?

GIOVANNI

We must hurry.

NENNELE

Good-bye, aunt.

IRENE

I 'm coming, I 'm coming; I 'll go downstairs with you.

SIGNORA LAURI

You will soon come back — my heart tells me so.

[*They go out chattering through the outer door. Giovanni watches them as they go.*

MASSIMO (*to Giovanni*)

Don't be afraid. They 'll make a fresh start.

GIOVANNI

Let us hope so.

[*All go out. Lucia remains alone and throws herself sobbing into an armchair. Nennele runs back into the room, takes Lucia in her arms and kisses her several times.*

LUCIA

Nennele, Nennele!

NENNELE

Hush, hush, hush! (*She runs out*)

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

A room plainly but comfortably and tastefully furnished. A low, panelled ceiling and wainscoted walls. In the wall to the left of the audience, a large window rather wider than it is high. The Venetian blinds must be arranged so that they may be opened and closed. Outside, trees close to the window. In the back, two doors. The one at the left leads to a small anteroom and thence to the stairway. It is the entrance door. The door at the right leads to Giulia's room. Between these doors, against the wall, a wooden sideboard with dishes on it. In the wall near the front, to the right of the audience, the door which leads to Nennele's room. Between this and the back, a little table placed against the wall. In the middle of the room a round table covered with a cloth. A reclining chair of carved wood near the window. Other wooden chairs.

Nennele, seated at the table in the middle of the room, is reading. Tommy, astride a chair near the window, is smoking a short, wooden pipe of English make. Giovanni enters from the outer door.

GIOVANNI

Nennele.

NENNELE

Yes, father?

GIOVANNI

You asked me for some money last evening, and I told you to remind me of it this morning.

NENNELE

Yes, but I did n't like to.

GIOVANNI

Why not? I thought of it just now and came up to bring it to you. (*He hands her some money*)

NENNELE

It 's too much.

GIOVANNI

A hundred *lire*. That will be enough to last you until the end of the month.

NENNELE

I would rather have less at a time.

GIOVANNI

Is it such a large sum?

NENNELE

No, but — out of the last that you gave me I lost track of thirty *lire*.

GIOVANNI

You lost track — ?

NENNELE

According to my accounts I ought to have thirty *lire* left, and I have n't anything.

GIOVANNI

You probably forgot to put down some items.

NENNELE

I must have — although I can't think of anything. Of course, I may have lost it. Anyway I would rather ask you oftener. Take it back. I 'll keep forty *lire*.

GIOVANNI

Oh, keep it, keep it all. One has to learn sometime or other. (*To Tommy*) Bored to death, eh, poor Tommy?

TOMMY

You bet I am — with this eternal doing nothing.

GIOVANNI

We must have patience.

TOMMY

It 's all right for you to talk; you 're busy.

GIOVANNI

Something will turn up. There will be a break before long.

NENNELE

Are you going back to your office? Remember that it 's four days since you have been out of the house.

GIOVANNI

I have work to do.

NENNELE

But you look so tired.

GIOVANNI

No, not tired. I have never felt so well as during the three months we 've been here. — Ah, today is Thursday. Massimo will be here.

TOMMY (*in the tone of one who is bored by the idea*)

Yes.

GIOVANNI

Well, then, I 'll walk to the station with him when he leaves this evening. Does that suit you?

NENNELE

That 'll be better than nothing. (*Giovanni goes out*)

TOMMY

It 's plain that things have n't changed much for him. Or they 've changed for the better. He used to work at Milan; he works here. No duns. Fresh country air. Goes to bed at nine o'clock. Sleeps. — What are you doing?

NENNELE

I 'm studying.

TOMMY

As far as contentment goes, if I had an income of a hundred thousand *lire* and an English country house built on the site of this lugubrious old barn even I would ask nothing more of the Creator.

NENNELE

What does the house matter when we have so much beauty just outside the windows?

TOMMY

The lily needs to be painted. Nature is an imperfect artist. I 'd like to see a park down there, with big shade trees — not fruit trees, mind you — and neatly mowed grass and an arbor among the tree trunks. And I could get along without seeing mamma planted in the very middle of the lawn, on her ignoble camp-stool, with her easel in front of her, intent on maligning nature with her misguided paint brush.

NENNELE

Is she still painting?

TOMMY

Undaunted! At this moment she has just put her fiftieth cotton Mont Blanc to soak in her fiftieth lake of bluing water.

NENNELE

Is she alone?

TOMMY

What a question! She is with her two brother artists — very revered masters! Great crimes are never committed without accomplices. But Mont Blanc lets them go on and does n't seem worried.

Look at them. They look as if they were moved by springs, all three of them. They lift up their heads like little sparrows waiting for a worm. With their eyes they gobble up their share of the landscape, and then they scramble to make it unrecognizable on canvas. Have you ever had a close look at those two?

NENNELE

At one of them — the old one. He comes here sometimes.

TOMMY

The other two send him. From time to time our ingenious stepmother remembers that she has forgotten a tube of paint, a brush, a fan. And the old one always trots to the house for it. On no account does the younger one ever budge from her side. And then the picturesque trio changes into a sentimental duet.

NENNELE

How bitter you are! What 's the matter with you?

TOMMY

Nothing.

NENNELE

Well, then, why are you so disgusted?

TOMMY

When did you miss that money?

NENNELE

What money?

TOMMY

The thirty *lire* that you can't account for.

NENNELE

Day before yesterday.

TOMMY

Where do you keep it?

NENNELE

In the drawer of the little table.

TOMMY

Don't think for a moment that I 'm asking for my personal benefit.

NENNELE

Oh, Tommy!

TOMMY (*after slight hesitation*)

If the worst came to the worst, I 'd ask you for some.

NENNELE

Do you need some?

TOMMY

Poor Nennele!

NENNELE

But you 've always had money of your own.

TOMMY

That time is gone — gone recently, but none the less gone.

NENNELE

I can't give you much. Do you want some? I will be economical with the rest. (*Goes to open the drawer*)

TOMMY (*overcoming the temptation*)

Close it up, close it up. And always keep it locked. You should n't lead people into temptation. Artistic temperaments are notoriously weak. (*Nods in the direction of the window*)

NENNELE

You should n't think ill of people. Are you convinced by this time that father did n't put any money aside after the failure?

TOMMY

Yes, I should say I am!

NENNELE

Are you sorry?

TOMMY

Can you ask?

NENNELE

And now listen to me.

TOMMY

Listen to what?

NENNELE

To see if I 've learned my lesson. Take this. (*Gives him a book*) Follow with your eyes without asking questions. It begins here. The article.

TOMMY

The article! You 're studying that stuff?

NENNELE

I have to teach it and I don't know it myself.

TOMMY

Don't you know what the article is?

NENNELE

Well, go ahead, then, and tell me yourself.

TOMMY

La, il.

NENNELE

You know that those words are articles. But you could n't tell me clearly and concisely what an article is. Perhaps, by accident, you could even do that. But how about the adverb and the interjection and all that?

TOMMY

Let 's see.

NENNELE

The article is a little word which may be declined.

TOMMY

Which is declinable, the book says.

NENNELE

But I 'm not merely reciting the lesson. I don't want to say it word for word; I want to be sure that I know the meaning. It is a word which may be declined, and which, placed before a noun, indicates, determines, shows whether that noun is masculine or feminine, singular or plural. For example, *il pero* and *la mela*. *Il* is the article of masculine sex because *pero* is masculine.

[*Massimo enters from the rear, puts down a little basket on the nearest chair, and stands listening, unseen by the other two.*

NENNELE (*continuing*)

And *la* is the article of feminine sex.

TOMMY

It does n't say sex, it says gender. Sex is not a nice word.

NENNELE

Of feminine gender.

MASSIMO

What the deuce are you two doing?

NENNELE

Oh, were you there all the time? I 'm studying grammar so that I can teach English.

MASSIMO

Are you going to teach it in Italian?

NENNELE

No, in French.

MASSIMO

And in order to teach English in French, you 're studying Italian grammar?

NENNELE

Because I can speak all right, you know; but I lack the elements. Of course there are some things that are the same in all languages. Don't you understand?

MASSIMO

I 'm afraid I don't.

NENNELE

I cut an awful figure the other day at that English lesson you arranged for me — the son of the widow Rouillet.

MASSIMO

You went?

NENNELE

I could n't believe that I was really earning my own living.

MASSIMO

A living is a great deal.

NENNELE

The place is impossible — the street, the house, the stairs, the rooms — a regular limbo as pictured by the holy fathers. And besides that, it 's at the other end of nowhere. And it was raining in torrents — pools of water everywhere. It was a good thing that Tommy went with me.

MASSIMO

So that you could both have a bath?

NENNELE

He got me a cab.

TOMMY

Don't admit such extravagance to Massimo. It hurts him.

MASSIMO

Quite the contrary. What are cabs for, anyway?

NENNELE

We get there. Tommy says good-bye to me. I go up the steps, holding blindly by the rail, my heart in my mouth. I ring the bell. The widow herself comes to let me in.

MASSIMO

Why do you harp so much on that *widow?* She did n't kill her husband.

NENNELE

She 's the widow type — born that way.

TOMMY (*in an exaggerated tone of reproof*)

Nennele, a lady who employs you!

MASSIMO (*looks at him; then to Nennele*)

Go on.

NENNELE

The wid — excuse me — the lady, leads me into a sort of general living-room where they also eat — for it smelled of cabbage — and begins to look me over from head to foot. And such a look! Then she asks me my age.

MASSIMO

Umm — !

NENNELE

Why?

MASSIMO

I made you out older than you are. I thought your youth might prove an objection.

NENNELE

Fine! Only you should have let me know. We had quite a disagreement about it. She said that I was twenty-six and I insisted that I was only twenty-two. — But to make a long story short: she called her son.

TOMMY

The orphan.

NENNELE

Who answers to the name of Gastone. And Gastone appears — an overgrown youth with a cold in his head, sixteen years old. I open my Ollendorf on the table to begin. And the mother sits down beside the son and stares me in the face as if her chief aim in life were to addle my brains. I begin by repeating a maxim in French, translating it into English, and asking Gastone to say it after me. But the mother! The mother wanted grammar, rules, definitions. A regular inquisition! I was suddenly forced to gaze into the awful abyss of my ignorance. Do you know what kept me from running away? The thought of the long, dark stairs which I could n't run down. There was nothing to do but to let her talk and follow along boldly: The penknife of my teacher, the hat of my aunt, the umbrella of my neighbor —

[*The old artist enters from the rear without being seen. He is quite an old man with long hair, whose looks bear out the romantic conception of an artist.*

ARTIST (*speaking almost in syllables*)

Pardon me. The umbrella of the lady.

NENNELE

Eh? (*Turns around dazed*)

TOMMY (*does the same*)

Our friend, the painter!

[*Nennele breaks into a laugh and is followed by Tommy and Massimo.*

ARTIST

I beg your pardon. Perhaps I have made a mistake. I asked for the umbrella of the lady.

NENNELE (*still laughing*)

You mean mamma's parasol. Tommy — wait, wait; I 'll go and get it. (*Goes out to the right*)

TOMMY (*to the Artist*)

Please excuse us. As you came in, you happened to repeat —

ARTIST

No offence, no offence. I understand. But the lady sent me. The sun is so strong.

NENNELE (*returning with the parasol and giving it to the artist*) Here it is.

ARTIST

Young lady, I thank you. Gentlemen! (*Bows and goes out*)

MASSIMO

Who is he?

TOMMY

He is one of mamma's artists, a Norwegian. Mamma has dug up two of them at the Art Club and now they all paint together.

MASSIMO

The same picture — all of them?

TOMMY

I regret to say that they are not so merciful. They are perpetrating three pictures. They are all three

working from nature, copying Mont Blanc, but each one makes his own. Don't you like the idea?

MASSIMO

I 'm no judge of such things.

TOMMY

You appear to disapprove. Mamma is doing it for lucre, you know. It will mean a great boost for the family exchequer.

MASSIMO

Does she sell her pictures?

TOMMY

That 's another matter. She *would* sell them.

MASSIMO (*to Nennele*)

How many lessons have you given?

NENNELE

Only one. I should have given the second yesterday, but I wrote that I was n't feeling well.

TOMMY

You may as well add that you wrote at my advice, and also that I dictated the letter. It 's the truth. If Massimo disapproves, he will at least know whom to blame.

MASSIMO

Massimo does disapprove, but he does n't blame anybody. It was to be expected —

NENNELE

Of such good-for-nothings —

MASSIMO

Look here, I did n't intend to say anything of the sort. It was to be expected that you would find the work hard and disagreeable at the first attempt, and become discouraged. It always happens. As for Madame Rouillet, if she was not born a widow,

as you say, she became one after eight months of marriage, when her husband, a civil engineer, was killed by a landslide in a mine into which he had gone with a rescue party after an explosion of fire damp. The widow lives upon a tiny pension which obliges her to eat cabbage rather than truffles — which, by the way, are not particularly fragrant either. The son is burdened with a high-sounding name because names are given to people in those early days when we are all about equally beautiful or ugly. If I ever have any sons, I shall give them good, plain names both to guard against ludicrous discrepancies later on and because I am personally inclined to find poetry in prosaic things. But, of course, I can't expect everybody to be of my turn of mind. As to that question about your age, I explained it to you. In houses where they have no reception room, it is natural that the mother should remain in the living-room, especially if her son is learning English from a young and beautiful Italian lady. And finally, she wanted grammar because in her young days languages were studied in that way and it is the only way she knows.

TOMMY

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

NENNELE

And I don't know any grammar!

MASSIMO

Oh, Lord!

NENNELE

It 's true. I never studied it. I was passed along from a Tuscan nurse to an English governess and from her to a German.

MASSIMO

You did things in a ladylike way — without hurting yourself with work.

NENNELE

And the result is that I 'm an ignoramus.

MASSIMO

Keep up the lessons and you 'll get along all right.

TOMMY

Why, yes. Two lessons a week, at three *lire* a lesson, makes in all six *lire* a week and twenty-four *lire* a month. Almost the wages of a cook!

MASSIMO

Less, less. If you deduct a *lire* and a half for a cab every time, you will have twelve *lire* a month left — almost the pay of many a workgirl who has to walk even when it rains.

TOMMY

Boom!

MASSIMO

What do you mean?

TOMMY

Nothing. Boom. A cannonade.

MASSIMO

And you are satisfied to go on living at your father's expense?

TOMMY

I have never done anything else since I was born and I have always enjoyed public respect.

MASSIMO

Respect?

TOMMY

Yes, sir. And if you want me to talk seriously, I

will tell you the reason. Man does not live by bread alone.

MASSIMO

Please explain the nature of the sauce that you supply.

TOMMY

There are in the world some few people whose task it is to guard pure intellect; that is, to refine the sensations, to preserve elegant traditions —

MASSIMO

Watchers at the sepulchre!

TOMMY

In a word, to incarnate beauty.

MASSIMO

O Lord! And do you consider yourself consecrated to that sacred mission?

TOMMY

I did when I was rich.

MASSIMO

So that if you and your kind did not exist, this poor world would — Oh, but beauty is within us. And it is more in me than in you. In me it is more whole-souled and more pure. To me that lake is beautiful at any time and whatever my circumstances happen to be. But if you are to enjoy it, you must have slept in a good bed, be well dressed and lounging in an armchair with a cigar in your mouth. Your beauty, then, is, to a large extent, manufactured by the upholsterer, the tailor, the furniture dealer and the importer of tobacco. (*To Nennele*) Take my advice: go on with your lessons.

TOMMY

Take mine; don't.

NENNELE

Tommy.

TOMMY (*to Massimo*)

It 's time to put an end to this edifying Arcadia that you have been trying to force us into. If my sister can find suitable work, well and good. I want to work too. Don't smile because I left your employ. A nice job it was you gave me — boss of a bunch of laborers boring a hole in a mountain covered with ice! A quick and convenient way to send me back to my creator! Outside, a thick crust of ice, and inside, darkest Africa!

MASSIMO

I stood it — for a year.

TOMMY

Oh, it 's all right for you. And ninety *lire* a month!

MASSIMO

With board and lodging in my house. And at that I had to pay an extra assistant to help you and to teach you the business.

TOMMY

Damp, muggy air. Naked, sweating men. For all the world like the pictures we see in the illustrated newspapers. In ten days I wore out three suits.

MASSIMO

Well, of course, if you would insist on dressing in white —

TOMMY

Was I expected to change even my manner of dressing? Fine business! (*Returns and sits down near the window*) Both of us want some occupation that is suitable to — to —

MASSIMO

To what?

TOMMY

To our tastes and abilities.

MASSIMO

You 've already found yours. An English pipe, some good tobacco, a seat near the window, and you 're suitably employed.

NENNELE

I can't let you speak like that to my brother.

MASSIMO

Is your father downstairs?

NENNELE

Yes.

MASSIMO

I 'll go down and see him.

[*He goes toward the door. On the threshold he meets Marta accompanied by an elegantly liveried little groom who holds a letter in his hand. Marta goes out again quickly. The groom says a few words which Massimo cannot hear.*

MASSIMO

What? Young Rosani? There he is. Here, Tommaso — here 's work for you. (*Tommy goes up, takes the note and reads it*)

MASSIMO

Irene —

NENNELE

I 've told you before that I 'm called Nennele.

MASSIMO

Pardon me. Your name is Irene, just as your brother's is Tommaso. I did n't give you the names, but now that you have them I don't like to call you

by any others. I detest pet names. I wanted to tell you that there are six trout in that basket, caught last night at Chamonix. They are beauties. I 'll take lunch with you. (*He goes out*)

[*Tommy has read the note and goes to the table to write. He tears up a first sheet and begins another with a movement of his head that indicates perplexity.*

NENNELE (*has in the meantime taken up the basket; she calls from the outer door*) Marta. (*She looks at the groom with a diffident air*)

[*Marta enters. She is a peasant woman dressed very plainly.*

NENNELE

Take these — some trout for lunch.

[*Marta goes out with the basket. Tommy has finished writing and calls the groom.*

TOMMY

Come here.

[*He leads him toward the window and speaks to him in a low tone. The groom replies in the same tone. Nennele is about to go out at the right.*

TOMMY

Won't you stay?

NENNELE

No, dear; I 'm not inquisitive.

TOMMY (*giving the note to the groom*)

That 's all. (*To Nennele*) I won't be here for lunch. I 'd prefer to avoid Mr. Preacher's company.

NENNELE (*incredulously*)

Is that the only reason?

TOMMY

By good luck I 've been invited elsewhere. (*Silence*)

NENNELE

Remember that it 's eleven o'clock, if you have to dress.

TOMMY

I 'll wait till mamma comes in; I want to speak to her.

NENNELE

You? That 's something new.

TOMMY

The invitation is for one o'clock, and I 'll go as I am. There will be nobody but men there.

[*Nennele says nothing.*

TOMMY

Don't you believe me?

NENNELE

No, I don't believe you.

TOMMY

All right. (*Goes toward the right*)

NENNELE

Tommy, let us two stand by each other! Let 's stand by each other! I feel so forlorn, so at the mercy of everything.

TOMMY

What is it now? What 's the matter with you?

NENNELE

I don't know. At Milan the failure, even though it came so suddenly, neither dismayed nor discouraged me. You remember I went so far as to expect downright poverty. Poverty has n't come. We have n't suffered any serious privations as far as I can see. Perhaps it 's just that. I don't know, I don't know! There seems to be something wrong about our entire life. It is as if nobody were where

he belongs, as if father did not take charge of things as he should. As for mamma — you can see for yourself! And you — you who were such a good chum at Milan —

TOMMY

Have I changed?

NENNELE

No. That 's just the point. You have n't changed. And here in this house, with this life, you no longer seem to fit in. It seems as if something were being desecrated. I can't make it clear to you.

TOMMY

I shall take Massimo as a model.

NENNELE (*standing near the table*)

What a horrible smell! (*She takes up the envelope of the note brought by the groom and throws it on the floor*)

TOMMY

Hello!

NENNELE

It 's only the envelope — you need n't be afraid. Here 's mamma. (*Runs toward the door of her own room*) The friends you are going to lunch with have rather doubtful taste. (*She leaves*)

GIULIA (*entering and putting down an artist's portfolio*) In the future I wish you would have the kindness not to disconcert my friends by laughing at them when they are kind enough to do me a favor.

TOMMY

I apologized to him.

GIULIA

He told me so. But he did n't understand what it was all about and came back very much embarrassed.

— What nice perfume! Have you been meddling with my bottle?

TOMMY

Don't intimate anything of the kind, mamma; you do yourself an injustice.

GIULIA

Why?

TOMMY

I assure you that you do yourself an injustice.

GIULIA

Oh! (*Understands*) I saw the groom going out.

TOMMY

What groom?

GIULIA

As if everybody did n't know him! He has the handsomest livery in Geneva or anywhere around. (*Opening the artist's portfolio*) Do you want to see?

TOMMY

What?

GIULIA

The picture that I did this morning. I dashed it off at white heat. I was inspired. That Helmer Strile is a great master. The other one, the old man, does n't count. He has a careful technique, but he sees only what 's in front of his nose. He does n't penetrate. He can't deduce. (*Showing her picture*) Look at that sky. Tell me if the air does n't vibrate. And to think that at Milan I painted like a schoolgirl! Of course I have n't yet got Helmer's strength; but I feel that I 'm going to have it. He told me so himself. Just think, he wanted to take this painting away with him! He said a wonderful thing to me. You date from today, said he, because you

begin to render the occult. He has such glorious phrases! He says that painting is the penetration into the occult, that it does not appeal to the senses, but to the soul. He transfigures everything he touches. His landscapes fly. Everything has wings.

TOMMY

Come down to earth for just a second, mamma. Can you let me have a hundred *lire*?

GIULIA

What did you say?

TOMMY

I asked you if you could let me have a hundred *lire*. Seriously, I need the money.

GIULIA

But I have n't got it. What little I had saved has been frittered away — not by me, you understand. The entrance fee to the Art Club alone cost me a hundred and eighty *lire*. I might have asked your father for it, because, as a matter of fact, I did n't join for my own pleasure. I did it in order to make my name known. And besides, I had to buy a picture.

TOMMY

A picture?

GIULIA

Yes. The editor of the Art Review has a craze for painting — regular daubs! But I had to do it to get into the good graces of his Review, which is read by all the foreigners. The native Swiss, you know, won't buy my pictures. — But how about your twelve thousand *lire*?

TOMMY

I lost the last thousand yesterday. I had kept my-

self afloat until then. But last night I had such a run of bad luck —

GIULIA

Where? At the Orloff house?

TOMMY

Exactly. Where did you suppose?

GIULIA

Is she really a Russian?

TOMMY

Of course she is.

GIULIA

And has she really ever had a husband?

TOMMY

What a question!

GIULIA

How old is she?

TOMMY

Thirty-two.

GIULIA

They say she 's forty-five; and they say she 's looking for another husband.

TOMMY

Is that what they talk about at the Club?

GIULIA

You ought not to gamble.

TOMMY

It 's the only clean way for a man like me to reestablish himself. I hate to insist — but give me the hundred *lire.*

GIULIA

I have n't got it, I tell you. Perhaps tomorrow.

TOMMY

Why tomorrow and not today?

GIULIA

There may be a chance tomorrow. But your father is n't willing, and neither is Nennele, who really rules in this house.

TOMMY

What has Nennele to do with it? What chance?

GIULIA

This evening there is to be a concert at the club to open the summer exhibition. I am exhibiting a dozen pictures. Helmer Strile has been insisting that I should go to the concert in person. He wants to introduce me to Goupil, the famous Parisian picture dealer who is passing through Geneva.

TOMMY

He 's crazy.

GIULIA

I had to tell him I could n't go. It is a mistake, because Helmer assures me that it would help the sale of my pictures.

TOMMY

A lot of fine talk!

GIULIA

I can't see what harm there would be in it.

TOMMY

Would you go with father?

GIULIA

Oh, the poor man is always so tired in the evening.

TOMMY

Then it 's out of the question.

GIULIA

On your word of honor — are you in debt?

TOMMY

No, I don't owe a cent. But I have a feeling that this would be a lucky day for me.

GIULIA

Are you going back there?

TOMMY

I 'm going for lunch.

GIULIA

Does Mme. Orloff play too?

TOMMY

Never. In fact, she hates it.

GIULIA (*trying to get into Tommy's good graces*)

What an interesting face she has! She looks like one of Mastro Luca's madonnas. She often passes here in the morning, driving her two ponies. She has such a mysterious, far-off look!

TOMMY

You talk like that to get on the good side of me. How despicable all this is — all this that you and I are thinking and doing.

GIULIA

Why is it despicable?

TOMMY

Don't you see it? It means that you are better than I, for I do see it, and — (*Stretching out his hand*) Put fifty there.

GIULIA

As if the Club were not a perfectly respectable place! The whole foreign colony goes there. Helmer had offered to call for me and bring me home again. But I don't like the idea. Not that there is any harm in it, but about certain things I am excessively cautious. The old one would come too.

TOMMY

At what time is the concert?

GIULIA

From nine to midnight. Oh, I have quite given up the idea of going. I 'll tell your father, so that later I won't have to reproach myself with the lost opportunity. But I won't insist. As to the money — (*Takes her purse from her pocket*) I 'll give you forty *lire*.

TOMMY

And three more for the cab. I can't get there all covered with dust.

GIULIA (*giving him the money*)

There.

TOMMY

Thanks.

GIULIA

But if you win you must give me half.

TOMMY

All right.

MASSIMO (*entering*)

Hello, Tommaso. (*To Giulia*) How are you, aunt?

GIULIA

The wild man has come down from the mountains.

MASSIMO (*to Tommy*)

I have just been talking to your father about you. He says that you are bored with doing nothing.

TOMMY

You bet I am.

MASSIMO

So much the better. I have an idea.

TOMMY

Tell it later. Just now —

MASSIMO

No, I must tell you about it at once. If you like the idea I will try to make arrangements this very day. I am leaving again this evening. I have a friend here in Geneva who owns a big sawmill. I know he is looking for a secretary.

TOMMY

No, thank you.

GIULIA

Think of being secretary to a wood chopper!

MASSIMO

A wood chopper!

GIULIA

Well, chopper or splitter, it 's all the same.

MASSIMO

And what is Tommaso, pray? A prince of the House of Austria?

TOMMY

I know your arguments. I have already read them in print. But I have n't time to discuss them just now. I 'm going out to lunch.

MASSIMO

Oh, was the note brought by that ape an invitation?

GIULIA

Ape! If you only knew. He 's Mme. Orloff's groom.

MASSIMO

Mme. Orloff's? (*To Tommy*) Are you going to lunch with that prostitute?

TOMMY

Massimo!

MASSIMO

I used the mildest word I could. Are you going?

TOMMY

Certainly.

MASSIMO (*grasping Tommy by the arm as he is about to leave*) Stay here. Aunt, have the kindness to leave us alone for a moment. (*To Tommy, who is struggling to get away*) Take care or you 'll tear your clothes.

TOMMY

Let go of me.

MASSIMO

Why, yes, if you 'll promise to stay here till I 'm through. Aunt —

GIULIA

Don't make a scene, there 's a good fellow, don't make a scene! Heavens!

MASSIMO

Please leave us alone. I have some things to say that no one else should hear.

GIULIA (*to Tommy*)

I 'll go and speak to your father. (*She goes out by the main door*)

MASSIMO

First of all I must ask you to excuse me for my violence! but I could n't help it. Do you know who Mme. Orloff is? You don't answer. Then I 'll tell you. She is a lady who has been under the surveillance of the police.

TOMMY

Of the international political police.

MASSIMO

No. That 's what she tells you — maligning the Nihilists — because the truth had got out and she

had to find some means of explaining it. The so-called Orloff —

TOMMY

Why so-called? He was her husband.

MASSIMO

To be sure — and a worthy husband. Only his name was not Orloff, but Borki. Orloff is the name of a province. Signor Borki kept a house of ill fame in Odessa. After he got rich he thought it would be a good idea to change his name. When he died four years ago, leaving a hundred thousand *lire* to the Russian church of Geneva, the Odessa newspapers waxed enthusiastic over his life and his good deeds. Did you know that?

TOMMY

I warn you that you are doing everything in your power to make me go there, even though I had formerly had my doubts.

MASSIMO

Yes, that 's the refuge of cowards who know they 're cowards. They want to be able to say they did wrong for the sake of getting even.

TOMMY

Do you think you can lord it over us all in this house on account of the two hundred and fifty *lire* a month for which my father gives you full return in honest work?

MASSIMO

I pay your father what I should pay anybody else. I am not a philanthropist, so I have a right to speak my mind. And even if I were, I should talk in the same way, because I despise your uppish delicacies. It is not a question of tyranny; although, if need

be, I should be quite capable of shutting you up in this room — twenty-seven years old as you are — and not letting you out until I was ready.

TOMMY

By what right?

MASSIMO

By the right given me by two stronger arms in the service of a saner head. If I saw you on the point of blowing out your brains, everybody would recognize my right to snatch the revolver out of your hand, even if I had to thrash you to get it. Relations with that lady would be more harmful to yourself and others than a pistol shot. And I disarm you.

TOMMY

I made the lady's acquaintance two years ago when I came to Geneva for the tennis tournament — a very exclusive affair; nobody admitted except by invitation. She was among the best people, surrounded by the flower of their gilded youth.

MASSIMO

Not the best people of the real Geneva society. The cosmopolitan mob.

TOMMY

I saw her again three months ago. Her manners were those of a *grande dame*. Her name stands at the top of all charitable undertakings. Her house is a model of correctness and elegance. People play cards there because cards, among men worth while, express that disregard of money which is the hallmark of superior people. *You* could not possibly understand these things. She herself never plays. She permits it out of her kindness and because she

likes to have people in the house. And I can tell you that I have met people there to whom you would be glad to make your best bow.

MASSIMO

No, no, no! I bow to nobody. People whose bow I might return perhaps — and rich people, mind you. For the rich people who go there are only harmless fools. But a poor man who frequents such a place must be a scoundrel.

TOMMY

You are hard on the poor.

MASSIMO

Because I respect them. Do you think that I should care to know you if you were still a millionaire? Did I ever look you up in the old days, you and yours? What does relationship matter to me? I do not hear any voice of the blood. Or I hear it only when it speaks of common struggles, sufferings and victories. Three months ago, when I saw you, young, intelligent and reduced to the common level of need, what hopes did n't I have for you! If you had been born poor, what a fine fellow you would have become! If you only knew what you are throwing away! Let me help you. Let us stop using harsh words. I am not speaking to you of duty, but of happiness. Do you think that there is any comparison between the satisfaction I have got out of life and what you have got? Why, think of the mere joy of willing and of winning — something more than a game of tennis! Your world is an empty nutshell. Your gayety comes out of a bottle of champagne. Do you think that you have ever laughed? I mean the kind of laugh that reddens

your blood and clears your head like a good sneeze. You smile and sneer, and that is all. Your mirth comes from a very narrow vein. Prosperity does n't make you happy and adversity stuns you. You do not smile except at people like yourself. You do not smile at people different from yourself because you are afraid of them. We laugh at ourselves, at you, at good and bad turns of fortune. You skim the pot; the good soup stays at the bottom. A travelling tinker on his rounds through his territory sees more than you do in your wanderings over the face of the earth. You complain because all countries are alike and you never notice that every man is different from all the rest.

TOMMY

Oh yes, the old tune about the evils of riches.

MASSIMO

Look out of the window and you will see riches. Those meadows, those groves, that lake and those vineyards — they are riches. Things are riches.

TOMMY

But you keep on wearing yourself out to get riches.

MASSIMO

I try to be sufficient unto myself. The law of life is not to live at the expense of others, be they living or dead. (*Pause*) Why do you go to that house? Answer in the same good faith in which I ask. I won't try to keep you here by force. I leave you free as air. Why do you go? Are you in love with the lady?

TOMMY

Who knows?

MASSIMO

Look me in the face and tell me squarely, without any of your joking.

TOMMY

I 'm after money. That 's the whole story.

MASSIMO

Which you get by gambling — by gambling, which expresses that disregard for money of which you spoke a moment ago? Exactly. Which is the hall-mark of superior people!

TOMMY

I was not speaking of myself.

MASSIMO

That goes without saying.

TOMMY

You need n't think that I don't despise myself.

MASSIMO

And what sort of opinion do you think I can have of you?

TOMMY

But I did n't make myself what I am.

MASSIMO

You might make yourself over.

TOMMY

I have n't the will power.

MASSIMO

Rely on someone who has.

TOMMY

On you, for example?

MASSIMO

Why not?

TOMMY

We don't understand each other.

MASSIMO

Then on your sister.

TOMMY

On Nennele. You have that much respect for Nennele?

MASSIMO

I think I have.

TOMMY

That 's interesting.

MASSIMO

I have much respect and much pity.

TOMMY

Why pity?

MASSIMO

Because your social connections are certainly not a source of joy to her. — And they might hinder her from making a good marriage.

TOMMY

Ah, there 's the motive! I might have known that there was something back of all that zeal for my moral salvation.

MASSIMO

If I wished to marry your sister, and you were branded and sealed for the dirtiest scoundrel on earth, I should marry her just the same.

TOMMY

Provided she would have you.

MASSIMO

Of course.

TOMMY

And if she would n't have you? Eh? If she would n't have you? What sort of figure would your boasted

will cut then? Eh? If she would n't have you? And what 's more, she won't have you! We are not of the same breed. Good-bye!

MASSIMO (*putting his arm through Tommy's, ironically*)

They say that Mme. Orloff is looking for another husband. You ought to push your claim there.

TOMMY

That 's an idea. Thanks for the suggestion. (*Seeing Nennele through the doorway*) Nennele.

[*Nennele enters from her room.*

MASSIMO

Try to hold back your brother. He seems bound to ruin himself. I have done all I could.

NENNELE

So have I.

TOMMY

You?

NENNELE

I know where you are going. It is n't hard to guess. She passes by here every morning with her groom. I don't know who she is. But she can't be of much account if you don't care to tell me that the invitation was from her. You considered it necessary to lie in order to deceive me. (*Enter Giulia and Giovanni*)

GIULIA (*entering from the rear*)

Nennele, get ready your prettiest dress. This evening I 'm going to take you to the concert at the Club.

NENNELE

Me!

TOMMY

Why?

GIULIA

It had n't occurred to me before. Your father just thought of it. It did n't seem the correct thing to go alone. Tommy would n't do. But under the protection of a young lady — He 's quite right.

TOMMY

Nennele shan't go to that place.

GIOVANNI

What did you say?

TOMMY

I beg your pardon, but you don't understand —

GIOVANNI

I don't understand what? Explain yourself.

GIULIA

That place is not a —

GIULIA

Not a respectable club? (*To Giovanni*) Ask Max who has known Geneva for years.

TOMMY

I did n't say —

GIULIA

Ask Max, ask Max. (*To Massimo*) Why don't you speak up?

MASSIMO

Oh, am I Max? I did n't remember your having used that version of my name before. — The Club is lively, but highly respectable.

GIULIA (*to Giovanni*)

Now, you see. (*To Tommy*) So now —

TOMMY

I 'm speaking of Nennele.

NENNELE

Of me only?

TOMMY

And it 's not a question of the club. (*To Giovanni*) If you have allowed mamma to join, it is a sign —

GIOVANNI

I had nothing to do with it. She mentioned it to me after she had joined. She told me that it did not cost a penny and that she had to do it in order to sell her pictures.

TOMMY

Oh, of course, mamma is an artist. She has gone into it with true artistic ardor — she produces —

NENNELE

Is it for *you* to talk in that way?

TOMMY

And an acquaintance with other artists may help her along. But Nennele!

NENNELE

If it is all right for mamma to go, it is all right for me, too. I can't see that there is any difference. Either it is not a proper place, and (*To Tommy*) you are opposed to it on her account; or it *is* a proper place, and then I 'll go with her.

MASSIMO

You 're right, you 're right.

TOMMY (*to Nennele*)

You know perfectly well —

GIOVANNI

What does Nennele know? It is my business to know it, too. I will not permit any holding back. Out with it.

TOMMY

I meant to say that our position —

GIULIA

Your position is the same as ours, and you frequent fashionable society. And such society!

GIOVANNI (*dazed*)

Tommy!

GIULIA

Are n't you going to lunch with Mme. Orloff?

GIOVANNI

Who is she?

GIULIA

She is a beautiful —

GIOVANNI

I did n't ask you. (*To Massimo and Tommy*) Who is this Mme. Orloff? (*Silence*) You don't answer — neither of you? Am I to be the only one left in ignorance in my own house?

NENNELE (*with much emotion*)

Oh, father, you ought to see — you ought to notice things.

GIULIA

Speak with respect to your father.

GIOVANNI

What can I see from my office. I am shut up there from morning till night. And besides —

NENNELE

You ought to come out. You ought to oversee things. Don't you understand? Everything is going to pieces in this house.

GIULIA

What is? What is going to pieces? Why, the idea!

GIOVANNI

Be quiet.

GIULIA

We are living peacefully — I am working. Going to pieces!

GIOVANNI

Hold your tongue!

TOMMY (*to Massimo*)

Are you satisfied now, eh?

MASSIMO

Yes, pretty well satisfied.

NENNELE

Take charge of things. Take charge of things. What does money matter? I will do the servant's work, if it comes to that. But you — your hand ought to be felt here. It ought to have been felt in Milan.

TOMMY

Nennele!

GIOVANNI

Don't interrupt her. She 's right. Do you remember, Massimo, what I said to you at Milan. I 'm a draught horse to do the work and nothing more. I ruined them — and I was n't able to arm them against the ruin.

GIULIA (*to Tommy*)

There you are. See what you got by meddling.

GIOVANNI

I told you so, Massimo. I 'm a bad father.

NENNELE

No, no, no!

GIOVANNI

And it was only right that you should be the one to reproach me for it.

NENNELE (*embracing him*)

No, no — forgive me. No, forgive me —

TOMMY (*to Massimo*)

You may take me to see your friend today. I 'll accept the position.

GIULIA (*to Tommy and Massimo*)

Trust her to do things on a large scale.

GIOVANNI (*caressingly to Nennele*)

Yes, dear, yes, dear. You love me, I know. I will do what I can — you 'll see. But leave me now — leave me. There are other things to be done. I want to know everything — Tommy will have to —

MASSIMO

Tommaso has renounced fashionable society, as your wife calls it. I will explain to you later. As for the Club —

GIULIA

As if anybody were giving a thought to the club! Or as if I went for my own pleasure!

GIOVANNI

Why did Tommy not want Nennele —?

MASSIMO

He was right — when he spoke of your position. Nennele is trying to get teaching to do. And if it became known that she was going about among society people — it would make it still harder for her.

[*Marta appears from the rear.*

NENNELE (*quickly, to Marta*)

Did you come to set the table? I 'll do it. You need n't wait. (*She fetches the cloth from the sideboard*)

GIOVANNI (*to Massimo*)

I 'd like to have a long talk with you today.

MASSIMO

As long as you like.

[*Giovanni goes and sits down thoughtfully near the window.*

MASSIMO (*to Nennele*)

Can I help you?

NENNELE

If you like. (*They set the table together*)

GIULIA (*to Tommy*)

I 'll have to write a note now.

TOMMY

So will I. But who 'll deliver it? It must go at once.

GIULIA

I 'll see to it. (*She goes to her room*)

[*Tommy sits down at the little table to write.*

NENNELE (*to Massimo*)

Tomorrow I 'm going to begin the lessons again.

MASSIMO

I have faith in you.

NENNELE

And how about the others?

MASSIMO

It 's too good to last — when the sky clears all at once.

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

The same room as in the Second Act.

GIULIA (*on the threshold of Nennele's room*)
Nennele.

NENNELE (*heard from her room*)
Yes, mamma.

GIULIA
Give me the key to the little table.

NENNELE (*entering*)
What little table?

GIULIA (*pointing to the one which stands against the wall*) That one.

NENNELE
What for?

GIULIA
Give it to me.

NENNELE
Excuse me. What for?

GIULIA
To get some money.

NENNELE
Is there some bill to pay? I 'll see to it.

GIULIA
There is n't any bill. I want the money for myself. Am I to give you a strict account of all my doings?

NENNELE
Certainly not. You are at liberty to ask father for what you want and I have nothing to do with it. But this money is for the house. It is in my change

and it is my business to see that it is used only for the house.

GIULIA

Are you the mistress here?

NENNELE

No. And for that very reason I cannot give away what does not belong to me.

GIULIA

Just as if Tommy did n't get money from you!

NENNELE

A week ago I offered him some.

GIULIA

Did n't I tell you.

NENNELE

But I would n't offer him any now. I have reproached others for being weak. I do not want to be weak myself.

GIULIA

Even Tommy is amused at the airs you give yourself.

NENNELE

I 've noticed that you two appear to have some sort of understanding between you. You seem to have become his confidant.

GIULIA

Precious little there is to confide. He 's undertaken a disagreeable task and he 's devoting himself to it. Do you doubt it?

NENNELE

No. But I don't understand why he avoids me. He seems to be hiding something from me. If he 's working, he 's doing his duty. I believe that in this house everybody ought to make it his business to attend to the things that concern him.

GIULIA

And it concerns you to be my governess, does it? For the last week I 've had you at my heels every minute. Doubtless by order of the master of us all — Mr. Max.

NENNELE

Is that all you have to say to me?

GIULIA

I have to say this: that if you think Max a pattern of all the virtues, you ought to marry him and put an end to a rather ambiguous state of affairs.

NENNELE

Are you sure you have nothing more to say? Father is just coming up. You might discuss it with him. (*Returns to her room*)

GIULIA

Miss Impertinence!

GIOVANNI (*entering with a package in his hand*)

Somebody brought this for you.

GIULIA

What is it?

GIOVANNI

I don't know.

GIULIA

Oh, it 's probably what 's left of my pictures — the ones that have not been sold.

GIOVANNI

Did you sell some? (*Goes to break the string*)

GIULIA (*smiling disdainfully*)

What a question! I was on the list of Club members who had sold pictures. Don't pull so hard; you might spoil them.

GIOVANNI

Then give me the scissors.

GIULIA

Untie the knot. The string will do for another time.

GIOVANNI

What an economical manager! (*Tries to untie the string*)

GIULIA

I suppose you think that Nennele is the only person who can keep accounts.

GIOVANNI

Oh pshaw, it does n't pay to be miserly. (*Takes the scissors from the table and cuts the string*) How many were there?

GIULIA

Twelve.

GIOVANNI (*counting them*)

Three, six, nine — they 're all here.

GIULIA

Impossible!

GIOVANNI

Count them yourself.

GIULIA

There must have been some mistake. I was on the list. Helmer told me so. They 'll send and get them back. You 'll see. (*She places the pictures on the sideboard*)

GIOVANNI

Don't think that I 'm disappointed.

GIULIA

There you are! At the first touch of failure you have no more faith in me.

GIOVANNI

But I never had any. And I thank the Lord that you 're no artist.

GIULIA

Oh, is that how things stand? Then you 'll agree with me that I ought to resume my domestic duties. I am your wife. The management of this household is my business.

GIOVANNI

Resume! At Milan the butler looked after the large accounts under my direction. And for the small ones there was Lucia, who took her orders from Nennele.

GIULIA

Because a young girl has to learn —

GIOVANNI

Exactly. And she has learned.

GIULIA

So I am to be under the control of Nennele?

GIOVANNI

You are under the control of no one. Am I under control?

GIULIA

If I want a cup of coffee, am I to go and ask Nennele's permission?

GIOVANNI

Tell Marta. Have you asked anybody's permission up to the present time?

GIULIA

While I believed myself useful along other lines and had a reason for it, then it was all right. I was making my contribution to the household, was I not?

GIOVANNI

To be sure you were.

GIULIA

But if I can't be useful in any other way, I 'll be an economical manager, as you called me.

GIOVANNI

What is there to keep you from painting?

GIULIA

Nobody has any faith in me. You 're glad when I don't sell my pictures. Very well, then. Bring along the cash-box and the account-book and the blue kitchen apron and I 'm ready for business.

GIOVANNI

Oh, have some little mercy on me. Don't give me any more worries.

GIULIA

Am I your wife? Am I mistress here?

GIOVANNI

And I — what am I?

GIULIA

That 's no reason for upsetting the order of nature. I 'll settle the matter with Nennele.

GIOVANNI

Leave Nennele out of the question, if you please. Don't drag in Nennele.

GIULIA

You 're afraid of her because she answers you back, because she talks a lot. But I have got a voice, too.

GIOVANNI

I am quite aware that you have.

GIULIA

And our young lady shall hear it.

GIOVANNI

Be careful. My head feels as if it were going to burst. I 'm tired, tired, tired. If you cause me any more worries, you 'll have me sick on your hands. You don't know, nobody knows, what a life I 've been leading for the past three months. Nobody knows. Take over the management, the accounts, the money, but don't let there be quarrelling in the house, for pity's sake.

GIULIA

Very well, on that condition. You 'll tell Nennele?

GIOVANNI

Yes, I 'll tell her.

GIULIA

Tell her at once.

GIOVANNI

If only the Lord in his mercy would send someone an inspiration to buy some of those —

GIULIA (*calling*)

Nennele.

GIOVANNI

Now?

GIULIA

It 's best to strike the iron while it 's hot. You 'll see in what good order I 'll put everything — and without being niggardly either.

NENNELE (*enters*)

Did you call? Has Massimo come?

GIOVANNI

Not yet.

NENNELE

The train gets in at nine. It 's eleven now.

GIOVANNI

Yesterday's storm must have caused it. It probably snowed in the mountains and he missed the train.

NENNELE

He would have telegraphed.

GIOVANNI

Or business has kept him in the city.

NENNELE

No, he always comes here first.

GIULIA

Your father wanted to tell you —

GIOVANNI

Leave it to me. (*Taking Nennele aside*) Nennele, mamma wishes to take over the management of the house from now on.

NENNELE

And you are going to let her have it?

GIOVANNI

She has a right to it, you know.

NENNELE

Of course she has. And it 's soon done. Here are the things. (*She goes to the little table to open the drawer*)

GIOVANNI (*going up close to her, softly*)

Are you angry about it?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI (*in a whisper*)

For the sake of peace in the house.

NENNELE

Yes.

GIOVANNI

Smile at me, little girl, smile.

NENNELE

How good you are!

GIOVANNI (*in a whisper*)

And — keep on looking after things a little.

NENNELE (*in a whisper*)

Don't be afraid. (*To Giulia*) Here are sixty-three *lire* and thirty centesimi. This is the account-book and these are the dealers' bills.

GIOVANNI

By the way, on Sunday I 'm going to take you both to Chamonix.

GIULIA

It was about time.

NENNELE

Why?

GIOVANNI

I 've arranged it with Massimo. He 's going to open his first section of railroad on Sunday. I 'm tired. A couple of days in the open air will do me good. I need a change.

NENNELE

Of course you do. But we don't.

GIULIA

Don't the ganders lead the geese to water?

GIOVANNI

I would n't get any pleasure out of it by myself. (*To Nennele*) Don't worry about the expense. That 's provided for.

NENNELE

But there are so many of us going.

GIOVANNI

Little miser! Put some trust in your old spend-

thrift father. I know what I 'm about. When Massimo comes, send him down to the office.

NENNELE

All right.

[*Giovanni goes out.*

NENNELE

I forgot. This is the key to the drawer. You will do well to keep it locked.

GIULIA

What do you mean?

NENNELE

A week or so ago I missed thirty *lire*. Three days ago I noticed that the gold chain Aunt Irene gave me was missing. I 'm certain that I brought it from Milan. But since we came here I have n't had any occasion to wear it. It 's impossible to tell how long ago it disappeared. The day before yesterday I put my bureau drawers in order and took particular note of the position of everything so that I should know if anything else was touched. And yesterday I missed that silver photograph frame. Do you remember it?

GIULIA

I think I do. A frightful thing. I hated it.

NENNELE

In any case —

GIULIA

That 's what comes of having cheap servants.

NENNELE

Marta is absolutely honest.

GIULIA

And then lots of things cannot be found when you look for them and turn up later.

NENNELE

I put it in its place only the day before yesterday. (*Somewhat ironically*) You have never missed anything, I suppose?

GIULIA

What are you smiling for?

NENNELE

I merely asked you if you 'd ever missed —

GIULIA

Oh, who knows how many things. But I trust everybody. A child could get the better of me.

NENNELE

Indeed!

GIOVANNI (*enters*)

Giulia, there 's a gentleman here to see you.

GIULIA (*nervously*)

Helmer.

HELMER (*entering*)

Pray excuse me for the unseemly hour. (*To Giulia, bowing toward Giovanni*) Won't you do me the honor?

GIULIA

What? You two have never met? Oh, Giovanni, this is Helmer Strile, a great master.

HELMER

I am honored.

GIOVANNI

I thank you.

GIULIA (*to Nennele*)

Helmer Strile. (*To Helmer*) My husband's daughter. — Did you know that they had sent me back all my pictures?

HELMER

I 've come to see you about that very thing. Where are they?

GIULIA

Here they are. (*Leads Helmer toward the sideboard*)

GIOVANNI (*softly, to Nennele*)

What 's he a master of?

NENNELE (*softly*)

He 's an artist. They call each other masters among themselves.

GIOVANNI

Has he been here before?

NENNELE

Never inside the house.

GIOVANNI

Do you like him?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

Neither do I. (*To Helmer*) Will you excuse me? I have to go to my office.

HELMER

Certainly, certainly.

[*Giovanni goes out. Nennele takes a book from the little table and goes to sit down by the window.*

HELMER

You should have been included in the Club's list. But the Geneva clique would n't hear of it. They praise you, but they say that you have been here only three months and can wait.

GIULIA

Wait! I 'll give up art.

HELMER

Don't say sacrilegious things. Art can't be given up. It 's in the blood. By a lucky chance a friend of mine saw your pictures. He fell in love with them and has authorized me to buy them.

GIULIA

All of them?

HELMER

For the present, one — or two. Two, two. I 'll have to arrange about the price with the secretary of the Club. Such things can't be discussed between you and me.

GIULIA

Did you hear, Nennele?

NENNELE

I think so. Yes.

GIULIA

I 've sold two pictures. I 'm particularly pleased to have you know.

NENNELE

Who bought them?

HELMER (*with slight embarrassment*)

A fellow countryman of mine, a great lover of art.

NENNELE

Oh!

HELMER (*in a whisper, to Giulia*)

We never see each other any more. I came here two mornings.

GIULIA (*in a whisper*)

She was here. (*To Nennele*) Nennele, will you be kind enough to go downstairs to where I keep my paint things and get from the big drawer that panel

— the one that is barely sketched. See that you don't smudge it. It 's still wet.

HELMER

Could n't I — ?

[*Nennele goes out without a word.*

GIULIA

I have a little keepsake for you. Wait. (*Runs into her room*)

HELMER (*looking at the pictures*)

What could n't I have bought with a hundred *lire?*

[*Giulia returns with a cabinet photograph in a silver frame wrapped up in tissue paper and gives it to Helmer.*

GIULIA

To my master and friend.

HELMER

Your portrait! How beautiful it is! How beautiful you are! And what an exquisite frame! How well the cold purity of the silver frames your face! A lovely thing! I thank you. (*He kisses her hands*)

GIULIA

Wrap it up quickly and put it away — hurry up so that she won't see it. (*She wraps up the frame in the tissue paper. Helmer puts it in his pocket*) For the past week she has gone out every time I went. She follows me everywhere. I saw you the other morning and was going to meet you, but — I knew that she would come along too. What a life!

HELMER

I 've come to depend upon you in my work. If you are not with me, the universe vanishes, things have neither voice nor color and confide none of their secret meanings.

GIULIA

What shall we do?

HELMER

I 've found such a beautiful place — on the other side of the lake. A pensive and solemn retreat.

GIULIA

Don't speak of it.

HELMER

Is it possible that you cannot succeed in getting free for a single moment? I long to have you see it.

GIULIA

Where is it?

HELMER

Oh no. I want to take you there myself.

GIULIA

It 's impossible — with you.

HELMER

You have robbed me of all my peace of mind.

GIULIA

I dare not listen when you talk like that. Is it far away?

HELMER

No. My old friend will go with us. Permit me to hope.

GIULIA

I should like to. Don't ask more. I 'm not free.

HELMER

But does the young lady never go out by herself?

GIULIA

Twice a week she has a lesson in the city.

HELMER

When? Tomorrow?

GIULIA

Yes, tomorrow she has one.

HELMER

Shall I look for you at the Club? At what time?

GIULIA

No, no, I don't want to go tomorrow.

HELMER

Why?

GIULIA

On Friday? Never.

HELMER

On Saturday, then.

GIULIA

She has no lesson that day.

HELMER

Sunday?

GIULIA

Sunday. Sunday, perhaps, I might be able. — Here she comes. Be talking.

HELMER

The realists refuse to understand that symbols — [*Nennele enters without speaking and resumes her previous seat.*

GIULIA

Well?

NENNELE

There was no panel in the drawer — neither sketched nor ready to sketch.

GIULIA

You did n't find it? In the little drawer.

NENNELE

You told me it was in the big one, but I looked in the little one too.

GIULIA

That 's strange — because —

NENNELE

Oh, mamma!

HELMER

May I take these pictures away with me now?

GIULIA

Just as you please. I 'll wrap them up. (*She takes up two pictures*) These two?

HELMER

They 're all beautiful. Suppose you make the choice.

MASSIMO (*enters*)

I 've been dreadfully delayed.

GIULIA

Oh, it 's you, Max.

MASSIMO

Good morning, aunt. (*To Nennele*) How are you?

NENNELE

I 've been looking for you.

MASSIMO

One delay after another. (*Noticing Giulia with the two pictures in her hand*) Are those your pictures?

GIULIA

You would n't like them.

MASSIMO

Let me see. I do like them.

GIULIA

Do you really mean it?

MASSIMO

I like them very much. But I don't know whether you should take that as praise.

HELMER

Art is a matter of emotion, not of reason.

MASSIMO

Excuse me, sir, I reason about it. I like a picture that I don't understand, and I like it for the very reason that I don't understand it.

HELMER

The penetration into the occult.

MASSIMO

What 's that?

HELMER

I say, the penetration into the occult.

MASSIMO

If that remark of yours were put on canvas I should like it. The pictures that I can understand dictate to me. It 's a wood, it 's a meadow. And I 'm not always disposed to be satisfied with a wood or a meadow. But in those that I don't understand I see what I want to see according to the humor of the moment. I do the dictating.

NENNELE

Fine, Massimo! The best pictures are the spots on the wall.

HELMER

Oh!

MASSIMO

Of course they are. In the morning when I wake up, I look at them and see clouds, dromedaries, caves, emperors, pancakes —

GIULIA (*disdainfully*)

How economical! (*She spreads out a sheet of wrapping-paper on the table*)

HELMER

One moment. (*Taking the portrait from his pocket*) Put this in too —

GIULIA (*in a whisper*)

Be careful with it.

[*Helmer starts to wrap them up.*

MASSIMO (*to Nennele*)

I thought I would never get here. Have you had villanous weather here, too?

NENNELE

Yes.

GIULIA (*standing in front of the table in order to hide Helmer*) All day yesterday and all last night.

MASSIMO

Up in the mountains there 's been accident after accident. The Arve running over its banks, two bridges swept away, houses ruined, three people carried down with the torrent —

NENNELE

Killed?

MASSIMO

Oh, in half a minute after they fell in! Not even time to drown! Dashed against rocks and stumps —

GIULIA (*to Helmer, who has wrapped up the pictures*)

Here, let me tie it.

NENNELE

We 'll see the ruins on Sunday when we go up to Chamonix.

MASSIMO

Oh, you 're going then?

GIULIA

As far as I 'm concerned, I think not. (*She begins to tie the package which Helmer is holding*)

NENNELE

Why, mamma, it was you who were so anxious to go.

GIULIA

I don't like sudden displays of self-denial. I think things over and then act for the best.

NENNELE

Indeed! (*The portrait slips from the package and falls to the floor*)

MASSIMO (*to Helmer*)

Look out!

[*He picks up the portrait. Giulia snatches it from his hand. Nennele has seen the frame and breaks out into a laugh.*

MASSIMO (*to Nennele*)

What 's the joke?

NENNELE (*smiling*)

Nothing.

GIULIA (*wrapping and tying up the pictures in a rage*)

There, it won't slip out now. (*To Helmer*) Here, take it. I 'll go as far as the garden gate with you.

HELMER

Thanks. Good morning, miss; good morning, sir.

[*Helmer and Giulia go out.*

MASSIMO

What was it all about?

NENNELE

I 'm disgusted, disgusted, disgusted. She has forced that sentimental young booby who is dawdling around her all the time to buy two of her pictures. She understood perfectly that he was buying them. He himself was dying to make her understand it. They sent me away on a pretext so that they could consult together. What understanding they came to, I don't know. But she, who had been crazy to go to Chamo-

nix next Sunday and snapped at me for making objections, she was now — did you hear it? — she was talking about prudence! Oh, what a despicable creature! And I 've put in a week at the stupid and odious task of being watch-dog. I 've been doing that most ridiculous thing! Can you imagine it? A girl of my age taking charge of her step-mother's morals! You are surprised at my talking like this. I ought not to know? I ought not to see? Everybody knows and everybody sees. The plays that are prohibited on the stage are to be seen here — in this house. The only surprising thing is that they can still offend me. Tell the truth and say that you think me ridiculous — vile. Oh, the pity and the horror of it! What do you think of me, Massimo — what do you think of me?

MASSIMO

I 'm learning. I 'm coming to know that my way of living has left me ignorant of a great many things. But you need n't worry about what I think of you. Your revolt seems to me a mighty wholesome thing.

NENNELE

I 'm at the end of my tether. If you only knew the ideas that come into my head sometimes! And I 've even turned Tommy against me. Tommy, with his exquisite taste and his sensitiveness, must have found my pretences and my whole conduct silly and despicable. And he has gone over to mamma's side. They have some kind of understanding between them. They smile at each other and talk together, and when I come near, they stop.

MASSIMO

Are you jealous?

NENNELE

Not as much as I should have thought.

MASSIMO

That 's pride speaking!

NENNELE

I can't understand it, and it worries me terribly. You don't know anything about Tommy?

MASSIMO

No. Any new developments?

NENNELE

I don't know.

MASSIMO

Is he attending to his work?

NENNELE

I think so. He goes away every morning, comes back for lunch, and stays out again until dinner time. But he seems unhappy. I 've tried so hard to put some courage and cheerfulness into him. I tried to will it for him. You once told me that the will could accomplish anything.

MASSIMO

When it is properly directed.

NENNELE

Do you think that you can always bring about whatever you wish for?

MASSIMO

Almost always. With time and silence.

NENNELE

Do you think that I could, too?

MASSIMO

I think so — within the limits of the reasonable. It 's true that if you tried to make a strong man

out of Tommy — who has such exquisite taste and sensitiveness. — And besides, you 're still hampered by a lot of warring instincts — or rather, your habits and your reason are at war.

NENNELE

I don't understand.

MASSIMO

At any rate, don't wear out your will by putting it to work at hopeless tasks. Those who are determined to go to ruin must go. What could you do with your step-mother, for example? I think that your father has weighed and judged her, and that he asks for only one thing — to be left to do his work in peace.

NENNELE

But don't you feel any rebellion?

MASSIMO

Do you rebel against the leaves that are scattered by the wind. Keep them on the tree if you can. They have such exquisite grace and elegance. But nobody knows what their end will be. Indeed, there is no end for people of that kind. They never settle things once for all, by a definite, final move. They flutter about from one dirt heap to another, and at last they disappear in the universal filth. Some fine day you turn around and they 're not there.

NENNELE

Do you think that 's true about Tommy, too?

MASSIMO

I don't know yet. I intended to see my friend this morning in order to find out about Tommy. But this delay has upset all my plans. I telegraphed

him from the last station to send word to me here. We 'll soon know.

[*Giulia enters from the rear.*

NENNELE (*as soon as she sees Giulia, to Massimo*)

Go and see if father is waiting for you in the office. As soon as you know anything, come and tell me, will you?

[*Massimo goes out.*

GIULIA

Did you send him away so that you could be alone with me?

NENNELE

No. Father told me to send him to the office.

GIULIA

Might I inquire the reason for that unseemly burst of laughter?

[*Nennele starts to leave the room.*

GIULIA

Come here.

NENNELE

Mamma, it 's much better for you to let me go.

GIULIA

I know what you think. I suppose there is only one silver frame in the whole world.

NENNELE

Let us not discuss it. It 's such a vulgar thing! I say nothing about it and I don't want to know anything.

GIULIA

You thought the frame was yours, did you?

NENNELE

Please let me go. Let us not discuss it. It disgusts me.

GIULIA

You suspected it. You subjected me to a nice cross-examination.

NENNELE

The frame was mine. I recognized it. I suspected as much before I spoke to you about it. After I spoke to you I was certain. Yesterday, in passing, I saw you go into my room. I went down into the garden and began to sing so that you would n't suspect. I saw you peer out through the curtains. I came up again in a few minutes and saw my bureau drawer open and then I understood everything. I spoke to you about it to show you that I was on my guard. I should never have referred to the subject again.

GIULIA

You 're inventing the whole thing. It 's not true that I went into your room.

NENNELE

Tommy saw you coming out.

GIULIA

I may have opened the door to look for you.

NENNELE

If you liked the frame you might have asked me for it.

GIULIA

But I did n't like it.

NENNELE

Indeed! For the purpose for which you wanted it —

GIULIA

What purpose? That brings up another question. What purpose? To show my gratitude to a man

who has given himself the trouble to teach me art, I put a portrait of myself into a frame of my own. You see, I tell you the whole thing, it is so innocent. It was a portrait of myself. You did not even know that much.

NENNELE

It was to be inferred.

GIULIA

You 've taken to inferring things?

NENNELE

Much more than you think.

GIULIA

Of course. You 've been spying on me for some time. It 's a nice sort of respect you show me! I have pretended not to notice it out of consideration for your poor father.

NENNELE (*smiling bitterly*)

Yes?

GIULIA

But now when you 've dared to cast suspicion on me, I want to go to the root of the thing. I want it cleared up.

NENNELE

No, mamma, no. Don't let us make a fuss.

GIULIA

We must have light on this whole affair. We must have evidence. You accuse me? Prove your accusation. Your father shall be the judge.

NENNELE

Oh, please don't.

GIULIA

You 're afraid, are you?

NENNELE

Afraid!

[*Tommy enters.*

NENNELE

Oh, Tommy, come here. You could n't have appeared more conveniently. (*To Giulia*) Are you willing to submit it to Tommy?

GIULIA

Of course I am.

TOMMY

What 's the matter?

GIULIA

Your sister accuses me of going through her bureau drawers. She says that yesterday you saw me take —

NENNELE

I didn't say he saw you take anything. You denied having been in my room. I said that Tommy saw you coming out.

TOMMY

Why, what sort of talk is this? I don't know anything about it.

NENNELE

Oh, Tommy, don't try to get out of answering. Can't you see? Do you want her to be able to say that I told a lie? Yesterday I met you here when I came up from the garden. I asked you — I remember I did it in a very offhand way because I did n't want you to suspect — I asked you if you had seen mamma. I did n't want to run the risk of going into the room and finding her still there. It would have been so embarrassing! And you answered —

[*Tommy still stands impassive, looking at nothing.*

NENNELE (*looking him straight in the face*)
Is it not so?

TOMMY
I don't remember.

GIULIA (*triumphantly*)
Ah ha!

TOMMY (*in a whisper, to Giulia*)
Keep still.

NENNELE
I suppose you have also forgotten that it was from you the first suspicions came —

TOMMY
What suspicions?

NENNELE
Oh, of course, it has gone out of your head, Tommy. You have such a poor memory!

TOMMY
Can't we drop it?

NENNELE
No, no. This too must be said to show how far my inventions go. Just a week ago — last Tuesday — I spoke to you about thirty *lire* —

TOMMY
You 're dreaming.

NENNELE
Mamma, I ask your pardon. I am a liar.

GIULIA
Now you see!

TOMMY (*in a whisper to Giulia*)
Please —

GIULIA
I 'm satisfied, I 'm satisfied. — You 'll find out in time. — I 'm satisfied. (*She goes into her room*)

NENNELE (*after a silence*)

Poor Tommy! How hard it must have been for you!

TOMMY (*with great bitterness, suppressing his tears by an effort*)

And you are the person whom I love most in the whole world.

NENNELE

I know.

TOMMY

Don't say anything to me. (*Goes and sits down at the little table and leans his head on it*)

MASSIMO (*entering from the back with a paper in his hand*)

Nennele.

TOMMY

Oh! (*Is about to get up and go away*)

NENNELE (*to Tommy*)

Stay here, stay here. I 'll send him away.

[*Tommy drops his head on the table again.*

NENNELE (*going up to Massimo and taking him aside*)

Leave us alone here a moment. (*Looking at him*) How pale you are! What has happened?

MASSIMO (*giving her a telegram*)

Read it. It 's from that friend to whom I sent your brother.

[*Nennele reads with increasing dismay and astonishment.*

MASSIMO (*taking back the telegram*)

He stayed just one day. (*Takes a step toward Tommy*)

NENNELE

Don't speak to him. Leave it to me. Have you told father?

MASSIMO

I did n't have the courage.

NENNELE

Go out on the lawn. I 'll call you later.

MASSIMO

Very well. (*He goes out*)

NENNELE (*goes up to Tommy, lifts up his head and kisses him*) What will become of you? What will become of us?

TOMMY

What did Massimo want?

NENNELE

He showed me a telegram from that friend of his. You stayed there just one day.

TOMMY (*getting up and walking away*)

Yes, it 's true.

NENNELE

Stay here, stay here by me, and let us talk.

TOMMY

What good will it do?

NENNELE

No good. We 'll only suffer a little more. Did mamma know? (*Tommy nods assent*) She was your confidant?

TOMMY

She guessed.

NENNELE

I did n't. I should never have guessed. Where were you all that time you stayed away from home? Won't you tell me where you were? You can talk to me, you know. I 'm the sort of girl who can be told things. Were you at that woman's? Are you in love with her? (*Tommy shakes his head*) You

stayed only one day. Did it bore you? Did you feel humiliated, as I did at my first lesson? Did the whole thing seem wretched and horrible? Or perhaps you knew at the very start that you could never keep it up.

TOMMY

If you only knew how the very sound of your voice hurts me!

NENNELE

I think I know, because it hurts *me* so much. You and I have been together too much. But perhaps it 's just as well. If you go to ruin, it 's the end for me, too. Do you know, this is the first time that I have failed to guess your thoughts. We used to understand each other so well. You remember when father married again we never said a word — never — neither about him nor her. Only you took me out for a walk every morning. We understood each other so well! You were so good.

TOMMY

It was easy.

NENNELE

You *are* good. (*Tommy smiles bitterly*) Did you think at the very beginning that you would n't keep it up — from the time that you told Massimo you would take the position?

TOMMY

Why do you insist?

NENNELE

I don't know. It seems as if everything hangs on that.

TOMMY

I don't understand.

NENNELE

It seems to me that the whole future depends on that — that it 's the most important question I can ask. I can't explain it. It just comes to me that way.

TOMMY

Strange that you ask me the very thing that has been pursuing me all along. You mean, was I able to come to a definite decision for even a moment?

NENNELE

Perhaps. Yes. For even a moment.

TOMMY

It 's hard to say. When I accepted, I was persuaded that I wanted to hold out. But — perhaps you noticed — I sat down at once to write a note to the place where I was expected for lunch. And while I was writing I heard an ironical voice within me: "Keep a loophole of escape open." I was astonished that the decision had n't cost me more of an effort. I kept saying to myself: "When the right moment comes I shall be able to decide." I was counting on things getting a grip on me. I went to the place. The owner showed me all over the works. Wonderful! An immense organism of exquisite delicacy and precision. Then he took me into his office and gave me two or three letters to write. That was all. There was nothing about it that struck me particularly — no exhaustion, no disgust.

NENNELE

No enthusiasm.

TOMMY

And the next day I did n't go back.

NENNELE

Did you put up a fight?

TOMMY

No. I did n't even decide not to go back. I simply did n't go.

NENNELE

Things did n't grip you then?

TOMMY

No.

NENNELE

Well, you have to grip them. — What do you expect to do?

TOMMY

I don't want to think about it.

NENNELE

Can you help thinking about it?

TOMMY

The thought is always in the back of my mind, but I let other thoughts cover it up. I don't dwell on it. I see myself as in a mirror, as I might be looking at any stranger. I know what will happen. I will do nothing to hasten it or avoid it. I give myself up to the current.

NENNELE (*as if following out a thought of her own*)

To the current of the Arve in flood — which does n't even give one time to drown — dashed against the rocks and stumps —

TOMMY

What 's that?

NENNELE

Oh, nothing. Something Massimo said passed through my mind. You mentioned the current —

and — but don't bother about it. It was just a queer fancy.

TOMMY

And father — has he been told?

NENNELE

Not yet.

TOMMY

Is it hard for you to have to live with mamma?

NENNELE

Oh — after all that has happened —

TOMMY

She 's an irresponsible. Like me, she 'll sink from depth to depth.

NENNELE

You ought not to speak ill of her — now that you have gone over to her side.

TOMMY

Oh, how I despise myself! (*Nennele does not answer*) And you don't know yet. If you only knew. — I ought to tell you everything. Do you want me to? As I used to do in the old days?

NENNELE

Yes, tell me — tell me everything. It 's hard to tell everything. But the harder it is, the more needful it is that you speak. Who knows? Tell me quickly — Tommy.

TOMMY

There 's a little aria by Metastasio that keeps coming into my mind: "O voice from my bosom flown."

NENNELE

Oh, misery!

TOMMY (*in a deep, hurried voice*)

I owe money to a woman. Do you understand? A great deal. I did n't ask her for it.

NENNELE

Don't offer excuses.

TOMMY

But it 's true. I must tell the whole truth, the bad and the good. She offered it to me — she insisted. I was losing and I wanted to get a new start. I would have given ten years of my life to get it — and I got it that way, easily, easily. Everything in my whole life has been easy — from the very beginning, invariably. Living has been easy, education has been easy, pleasures have been easy. Deference to my betters and kindness to my inferiors have been easy. Religion has been easy, vice has been easy. Only one thing was difficult — to decide. But I did n't have to make any decisions. Up to three months ago my decisions were all made either by habit or caprice. When the day came that I needed to exert my will —

NENNELE

It was rusty.

TOMMY

Oh, worse than rusty. There was no wheel — there was no machinery.

NENNELE

You could n't even decide for evil.

TOMMY

Oh, evil — that takes care of itself. It is evil that decides for me.

NENNELE

How much do you owe?

TOMMY

What 's the use of telling?

NENNELE

Suppose I should write to Aunt Irene who has so much money.

TOMMY

She would send me a scarf-pin.

NENNELE

I could ask Massimo for it.

TOMMY

I 've no doubt that he 'd give it to you. But after that! It would begin all over again. Better to take the plunge once for all.

NENNELE (*staring at him with wide-open eyes*)

The plunge!

TOMMY (*smiling*)

Not into the water, you know. Did you think I was talking about committing suicide? We don't belong to the class of people who do that sort of thing.

NENNELE

No?

TOMMY

I mean the plunge into millions. I 'll pay her back — by marrying her.

NENNELE (*horrified*)

You 're going to marry that woman?

TOMMY

I 've given my word. Inside of a week.

NENNELE

And I tell you that you won't marry her inside of a week.

TOMMY

What can keep me from it?

NENNELE

You 'll find out.

TOMMY

Mind you, if Massimo says a single word to me —

NENNELE

He won't.

TOMMY

And I advise you not to say anything about it to father. It would do no good. There 's no sense in worrying him ahead of time. The moment he found it out I should leave the house. I 'm of age. When the thing is over — we 'll leave Geneva — and he 'll know.

NENNELE

Where are you going now?

TOMMY

To her.

NENNELE

Good-bye, Tommy.

TOMMY

You won't ever speak to me again, will you?

NENNELE

I don't know what you 're saying. Good-bye, Tommy. Good-bye, poor Tommy.

[*Tommy goes out hastily.*

NENNELE (*remains standing rigid and motionless beside the table; with an unconscious movement she beats with her finger on the table, looking straight ahead into space*) Everything — everything gone! It 's all over! (*She repeatedly passes one hand over her head as if stroking her hair*) Tonight.

MASSIMO (*entering*)

I saw him go out. You did n't call me.

NENNELE

That 's true. Excuse me. Do you know? He 's going to marry that woman.

MASSIMO

Could n't you make him listen to reason?

NENNELE

I did n't even try. That 's the way this house is going to pieces. It 's getting ready to fall.

MASSIMO

Your brother is n't the whole house.

NENNELE

The rest are just the same. Mamma is going to ruin by a different way. I 've seen such things to-day! A day of revelations!

MASSIMO

But your father?

NENNELE

Yes, he too!

MASSIMO

So upright, so good!

NENNELE

It 's true. And I would like to kneel down before him with clasped hands to show him the love I have for him. But there are times when truths reveal themselves naked and inexorable. And one must recognize them. Even he is weak.

MASSIMO

No.

NENNELE

He has none of the energy that overcomes obstacles and dominates people. You are a thousand times stronger than he.

MASSIMO

I don't believe it. I have the energy that undertakes. He has the energy that resists. Which is the most difficult? The one that gives the least satisfaction.

NENNELE

Oh, Massimo, if you only knew how I hate to tell you these things. They are such little things! But you must know, because you are the only one who will be left to him.

MASSIMO

I — the only one?

NENNELE

Listen. This morning he took the management of the house from me and gave it to mamma. It makes me smile to think that I am telling you — I am so far from all that now. He took it from me — and I don't blame him in the least. But right on top of it he came to me and half asked my pardon and whispered to me that I should look after things anyway! Do you see?

MASSIMO

How proud you are!

NENNELE

Oh no. But I had set him up so high. Every little failing in him hurts me more than the worst faults of the others. I know what he is earning. At the beginning we went along very carefully; but for the last month we have been spending a great deal more — and I told him so — and he laughed about it. I 'm a wretch, I know, to think it and say it, but for him the plaster is crumbling, while the bricks are

falling for the others. In both cases the house is going to fall.

MASSIMO

Will you marry me, Irene?

NENNELE

I can't accept charity.

MASSIMO

You won't?

NENNELE

No.

MASSIMO

You don't like me?

NENNELE

It is n't that! I don't think you like me — in that way. I don't think that you 've ever really understood what sort of person I am.

MASSIMO

I understand — perfectly.

NENNELE

Yes?

MASSIMO

What is it that laughs that way, deep down in your eyes?

NENNELE

You see something that laughs? And yet I thank you for it, Massimo. (*Long pause*) Are you going back this evening to Chamonix?

MASSIMO

I have to. I have work to do. Why do you ask?

NENNELE

Oh nothing. It 's all right. (*Massimo goes toward the door*) Are you going?

MASSIMO

Yes, I feel like taking a walk.

NENNELE

Would you like me to go with you?

MASSIMO

No. I want to be alone.

NENNELE

Are you going away angry?

MASSIMO

No. I 'm just going to walk up and down outside.
(*He goes out*)

NENNELE (*sadly*)

He did n't understand.

CURTAIN

THE FOURTH ACT

The same scene as in Act III. It is a moonlight night. But the Venetian blinds are closed so that the moonlight cannot enter the room. There is a lamp with a green shade on the table in the middle of the room, where Giovanni sits writing. Nennele enters cautiously from her own room.

GIOVANNI

Eh? (*Turns toward Nennele's door and listens; standing close to the wall, Nennele remains motionless*) Oh! (*He shrugs his shoulders and resumes his work*)

[*Nennele, keeping as far away from her father as possible, moves toward the door. Arrived at the door, she turns and throws a kiss to Giovanni. She starts to open the door. The latch rattles.*

GIOVANNI (*getting up*)

Who the deuce can it be? Who 's there? (*He lifts the shade from the lamp; Nennele has opened the door and slipped out*) Nennele! (*He follows her, overtakes her and brings her back*) What does this mean? What does this mean? Where were you going?

NENNELE (*she has a dark shawl over her head and appears much agitated*) I could n't sleep. I wanted to get out into the air.

GIOVANNI

Don't you feel well?

NENNELE

Yes, perfectly — but it 's so hot. I don't know. I wanted to get out into the air.

GIOVANNI

What 's the matter with you? What is it?

NENNELE

I don't know. I had to have air. Let me go.

GIOVANNI

There 's plenty of air here. (*He leads her to the large window and opens the Venetian blinds so that the room becomes filled with moonlight*) Sit down here. Here you can get all the air you want — and cool off. Don't you feel chilly?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

Will you have a little cognac? (*He feels her pulse*) How fast your pulse is! Don't you feel well? Do you want a cup of camomile tea? Shall I call mamma — or Marta?

NENNELE

No, don't call anybody. I don't need anything. I 'm all right.

GIOVANNI

You 're trembling all over.

NENNELE

I tell you I 'm all right. But I was smothering in my room. (*She suddenly bursts into convulsive sobs and throws her arms about his neck*) Oh, father!

GIOVANNI

What is it? What is it? You frighten me — Nennele! Come, Nennele!

NENNELE (*weeping*)

Oh, let me —

GIOVANNI

Cry, cry, yes, cry, my darling. Cry if it will do you any good. You can tell me afterward. (*Nennele stops crying and looks about as if dazed*) Do you feel a little better? It 's nervousness. Stay here and be quiet. Had you already gone to bed?

NENNELE

No. I stood at the window in there a long time.

GIOVANNI

You seemed so happy this evening. At dinner you ate and talked such a lot. When Massimo got up to go, you kept talking about our trip to Chamonix on Sunday. You seemed to be on such good terms with mamma. I was so glad to see that. You felt nothing then?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

Were you disappointed because Tommy was n't at dinner? But I 'm glad to see him enjoying himself a bit. Do you know who the friends were that had invited him?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

Some friends from Milan, mamma said.

NENNELE

Probably.

GIOVANNI

Has n't he come in yet?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

It 's a wonderful night.

NENNELE (*still a little dazed*)

I was standing at the window. I was waiting for him.

GIOVANNI

You were waiting for him? Did you want to speak to him?

NENNELE

No. I was waiting for him to come home — I was afraid I might meet him.

GIOVANNI

Afraid you might meet him?

NENNELE

Um — (*Shakes her head as if she had become aware that she had said something not intended*) That was n't what I meant to say.

GIOVANNI

Your head is still a little confused.

NENNELE

Perhaps.

GIOVANNI

Do you know what caused this? The storm we had last night. It left a peculiar sultriness that lasted all day. I felt it in my bones. — Even when you said good night to me, I thought that your eyes looked strange. They were so brilliant.

NENNELE

I 'm all right now. I 'll go back to my room.

GIOVANNI

I 'll go with you.

NENNELE (*quickly*)

No.

GIOVANNI (*smiling*)

Oh! Do you say "no" like that? And to your father? Listen to this tone, young lady. No! But I say "yes." Come along.

NENNELE

Let 's stay here instead.

GIOVANNI

What is there in your room that I 'm not allowed to see? What great mysteries! Nerves are capricious things. Do you want to rest a little? (*He draws up an armchair*) Put your feet here — this way. And keep quiet. You don't want to talk, do you? We 'll keep each other company. (*Goes back to the table and begins to write*)

NENNELE (*after a pause*)

What are you doing?

GIOVANNI

I have a piece of work to finish.

NENNELE

Tonight?

GIOVANNI

I have to. (*A pause*) Nennele.

NENNELE

Yes, father.

GIOVANNI

When you passed through here just now to go out, and I asked: "Who 's there?" why did n't you answer?

NENNELE

I did n't hear you. (*A pause*) You ought not to

stay up so late at night. Massimo gives you too much work to do.

GIOVANNI

No, he does n't.

NENNELE

I 'm going to tell him so.

GIOVANNI

I 'm not working for Massimo at all.

NENNELE

What?

GIOVANNI

You 've caught me in the act, so I may as well confess. It 's a little extra work that I 've undertaken to do. I saw that my salary was not going to be enough. — I happened upon some good people —

NENNELE

Oh!

GIOVANNI

But — it 's a small matter.

NENNELE

How long have you been doing this?

GIOVANNI

A month and a half. Not every night, you know. And now I 'm through. This is the last night. I 've only to recopy the accounts. I sat down here to do it. The other nights I worked in the office.

[*Nennele gets up and goes toward her father with her hands clasped.*

GIOVANNI

What 's the matter?

NENNELE

Father, I want you to forgive me.

GIOVANNI

For what? For what must I forgive you? (*Smiling*) For this little extra work?

NENNELE

It is n't that. Forgive me.

GIOVANNI

How strangely you look at me! Just as you did when you said good night. Come here. What is it that I must forgive you for? What have you done to me? Where were you going? Why did n't you answer when I called you? You must have heard me. I called twice. Where were you going? Tell me. You said you were afraid you might meet Tommy. What is it that I 'm not allowed to see in your room? Ah! (*Rises*)

NENNELE

No, no!

GIOVANNI

Stay here. And don't move. Do you understand? (*He takes up the lamp, goes and locks the outer door and then hurries into Nennele's room; she remains motionless near the table; Giovanni returns with a letter in his hand*) A letter for me? (*Puts down the lamp*)

NENNELE

Don't read it, father.

GIOVANNI

I don't need to. (*He throws the letter on the table*) You 're not the rambling sort. You were not running away to see the world. You were running away to—(*A long pause*) You were going to do that! You, Nennele! You were able to conceive such a frightful idea! You were able to carry it out! You

crossed this room, you saw me, you would have gone out of this house where I was sitting and you would have — And tomorrow I should have been going about the streets crying like a madman for my daughter. Or this very night they might have brought you here. They would have called me — I would have seen you — there — dead — my Nennele — my Nennele! (*A long pause*) Why? Why? Why? What has happened? I must know. I must know what has happened. To kill yourself — oh! What have I done to you? What have the others done to you? What is this thing in my house that I know nothing about?

NENNELE

I was crazy, I was crazy. Don't ask me — I was crazy.

GIOVANNI

Tell me what it is. Tell me. I command you. Is it Tommy?

NENNELE

Partly. Tommy is ruined. He 's going to marry a bad woman. And he has to do it! Massimo will explain. I don't know the details. I just found it out today.

GIOVANNI

Where is he?

NENNELE

With her, I think. I don't know, I don't know. I only know that he is past helping. (*Giovanni seems stunned*) And I was going to leave you when you had most need of help and comfort, when you were most alone. And I did n't consider you, and you were considering us all the time and living for us.

GIOVANNI (*pursuing an idea*)

They scatter. They blow away — they blow away!

NENNELE

And I thought unjust things about you and judged you unjustly. Now you must listen to me. I have to confess. I must tell you what I thought of you. The faults of the others seemed gross and horrible. But what I thought of you gnawed at a deeper and more sensitive part of me. I thought that you were n't doing enough for us. Don't you understand? Don't you hear anything of what I 'm saying?

GIOVANNI

Yes, dear. I hear. You were right. I have n't done enough for you.

NENNELE

Oh!

GIOVANNI

I don't mean here and now. Here I cannot act differently or do more. I 've seen how things were going — oh, how many times! But I could n't do any more. At Milan, however, when you were children, I could have done more. But then it seemed to me that it was enough to make you rich.

NENNELE

If you only knew how I look up to you! What a sense of peace and security it gives me to feel your watchful protection! Why don't people ever talk about such things? Why don't we ever tell each other everything? Nobody ever tells everything about himself. It does one so much good to speak out one's very soul. No sorrow, no joy will ever be able to make me forget the happiness that I feel

at this moment, with you, close to you, understanding and worshipping. Do you forgive me?

GIOVANNI

Dear child, I forgive you and bless you. (*He holds her head in his arms on his breast; then he kisses her brow: then he releases her and walks up and down; finally he goes to the window and looks out*) What a wonderful night! Come here. You 're not cold, are you?

NENNELE

No.

GIOVANNI

You said that *no* as you used to say it when you were a little girl — long drawn out, with such a lot of vowels. No-o-o-o-o-o-o. You 've not changed much. I can see you again with your little face — (*He interrupts himself to look intently out of the window*) — with your little face as it was then. You 've grown thinner. You were such a lovely little girl.

NENNELE

Don't say such things.

GIOVANNI

People on the street would turn to — (*He looks out again*)

NENNELE

What 's the matter? This is the second time that you 've interrupted yourself. What do you see out there?

GIOVANNI

I thought I saw a man there under the trees. I must have been mistaken. It was the moonlight casting shadows.

NENNELE

There is — there is someone!

GIOVANNI

Do you see him?

NENNELE

Now he 's standing still. He 's in the shadow. No. (*She peers out again sadly*) No, no.

GIOVANNI

You say it sadly. Are you disappointed because there 's nobody there? Who did you think it was?

NENNELE

Why the idea! Who should it be?

GIOVANNI

Did you think it was Tommy?

NENNELE

No. Nobody.

GIOVANNI

You have n't any more of those bad thoughts?

NENNELE

Oh no. Never.

GIOVANNI

You 'll never think of leaving me again? But I suppose some day you 'll have to leave me. I must hope so. Indeed, I had hoped —

NENNELE (*grasping him by the arm*)

It *is* someone! There he is. He has come up in the shade of the hedge — to listen to us. Do you see him?

GIOVANNI

Where?

NENNELE

There, behind that shrub. Look at his shadow there in the moonlight. Do you see? (*With joyous ex-*

ultation) He stayed. He was watching. He stayed for me. He understood.

GIOVANNI

What are you saying? Who is it?

NENNELE

Do you want me to call him? Massimo! Won't you come in?

CURTAIN

SACRED GROUND

(Diritti dell' Anima)

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

1894

PERSONS

PAOLO
MARIO, *his brother*
ANNA, *his wife*
MADDALENA, *a servant*

The action is laid at a small town in the district of Brianza, near Lago di Como. The time is the present.

SACRED GROUND

A dignified but simple room, with solid, old-fashioned furniture in good condition. It has a fireplace in which papers may be burned, and contains a sofa and a writing-desk among its furniture. At the back is the entrance door. At the left there is a door leading into Anna's apartments. At the right is a window.

Paolo is sitting at the writing-desk, upon which lies a mass of papers in disorder. Maddalena enters.

PAOLO

Well, has he got back yet?

MADDALENA

Not yet.

PAOLO

You 've taken your time about looking for him.

MADDALENA

I went to the Post Café.

PAOLO

I told you to look in his room and in the garden. You did n't have to scour the countryside.

MADDALENA

I felt sure he was n't there. And he was n't at the Café either. But they told me where he was. It can't be long before he gets back. He went to the Poggio station to meet the engineer who is coming to see about the water supply. The tax collector saw him start off on foot. He always walks. But

he 'll come back in the stage on account of the engineer. The stage ought to be here at any minute. But it 's certain that — Are you listening?

PAOLO

No. You may go.

MADDALENA

Yes, sir. But it 's certain that if the engineer really comes, your brother won't go away tomorrow. You and your wife expect to go tomorrow, don't you?

PAOLO

Of course he 's going. — I don't know. — Yes, we 're going tomorrow. — Leave me alone and don't bother me.

MADDALENA

Well, you'll see if I 'm mistaken. I tell you that your brother won't go away tomorrow — or the day after tomorrow. Here he is.

MARIO (*enters*)

Have you been looking for me?

PAOLO

Yes, for the last hour.

MADDALENA

Your brother was just asking me —

PAOLO

I was n't asking you anything. Go away. (*He takes her by the arm and puts her out of the room*)

MARIO

What 's happened?

PAOLO

What an irrepressible old woman! Do you think she 'll stay there with her ear to the keyhole?

MARIO

No. Don't bother about her. If you listen you 'll

hear her out in the garden already. What 's happened? You seem all worked up.

PAOLO (*after a pause*)

Do you know why Luciano killed himself?

MARIO

No.

PAOLO

He killed himself for love — for love of Anna. I have the proofs — there they are on the desk. I found it out today — just a little while ago. He killed himself for love of my wife. You and I were his only relatives; he was my playfellow as a child and my dearest friend. And he tried to get her away from me. But she repulsed him. He kept on. She sent him a crushing answer, and in a fit of despair produced by it, he killed himself.

MARIO

How did you find it out?

PAOLO

I have the proofs, I tell you. I 've been reading them over for the last hour. I 'm still bewildered. They 've been there for a month. I was in Milan when I got the telegram from London announcing the suicide; and I went at once to Luciano's lodgings and gathered up all his papers and made a sealed packet of them which I brought here with me.

MARIO

I told you to burn them.

PAOLO

I was going to; but then I thought it best to wait until the management of the hospital to which he left his money had verified the accounts. An hour

ago the town clerk came here on behalf of the subprefect to bring me the pocketbook that was found on the body. You know our counsel sent it from London to the foreign minister. I was just about to lock it up in the desk when it occurred to me that it might contain something that could throw light on this strange suicide that had puzzled us all. (*Mario moves uneasily*) Did you — by any chance — guess the reason?

MARIO

Did I guess —?

PAOLO

Leaving suspicions aside, did you know that he was in love with her?

MARIO

Go on and tell your story. Don't get excited.

PAOLO

No. Answer. Did you know?

MARIO

Yes, I *had* noticed that Luciano was losing his head.

PAOLO

And you said nothing to me about it!

MARIO

What was I to say? When such things come to one from outsiders they loom much larger and are much more offensive. And then there was the possibility of my being mistaken. I never see you and Anna except for a short time here in the country. If you who live in the same house with her all the year round had noticed nothing. — Besides, Anna is a woman of character and quite able to take care of herself.

PAOLO

Oh, Anna — Anna is a saint! I have always thought so. But now —

MARIO

Go on. Tell your story.

PAOLO

In the pocketbook I found a letter, and I recognized Anna's handwriting on the envelope.

MARIO

Was it at all out of the way that your wife should write to our cousin?

PAOLO

Of course not. I read the letter. Here it is. (*Mario puts out his hand to take it*) No. I 'll read it to you. (*Reading*) "You write me — " (*Speaking*) There 's no superscription. (*Reading*) "You write me that if I don't answer, you will return at once. I love my husband. That is my answer — that, only that, and always that. Please don't torment me. — Anna."

MARIO

Well, well!

PAOLO

The scoundrel!

MARIO

What 's the date on that letter?

PAOLO

Luciano himself took care to make known the day and the hour that he got the letter. He wrote underneath in pencil: "Received today, the 20th of June, at eleven o'clock in the morning." He killed himself before noon.

MARIO

Poor fellow! It 's pretty evident that he went insane. That writing alone shows it.

PAOLO

Of course I did n't stop there. I opened the sealed packet. In it I found four other letters from Anna, all to the same effect and in the same tone. The first is dated three years back. It contains only a few words. She sends back to Luciano a letter that he had written her. I looked for the letter, but it was n't there. He must have destroyed it and kept only hers. Then there is a note from Rome. You know that last winter Anna was in Rome with her mother for a month. Needless to say, the lover ran after her. Anna refused to see him. Then there is a long one which must have been written when he was recovering from that fall from his horse. It 's the only long one of the five — reasoning with him, imploring him in terms of affection. A wonderful letter, kind, lofty. Read it, read it.

MARIO

No, no, no!

PAOLO

Listen — just to this —

MARIO

No, I don't want to.

PAOLO

It 's all about me, and about how he and I were such good chums as boys. She speaks of you too. She says —

MARIO

No, please. It 's not necessary. I don't want to listen to proofs of my sister-in-law's honesty. —

Why keep dragging out those poor letters? It 's a great pity that you ever discovered them at all.

PAOLO

A great pity! Is it a great pity that I can now stop weeping for a false friend who tried to rob me of —

MARIO

Oh, stop harping on it. He 's dead, and he robbed you of nothing. And even if he were alive, he would still rob you of nothing. Anna was quite able —

PAOLO

Yes, how about that? How about that? Is that a little thing? Is that a great pity? I 've never had a shade of doubt concerning Anna — never — and the thought never entered my head. — But it 's one thing not to doubt, not to have a thought of doubting, but it 's quite another to have the actual proof of her fidelity and love. " I love my husband," is the refrain of all her letters.

MARIO

Did she have to tell you so?

PAOLO

She did n't tell *me*. She told him. She told him, you understand. Luciano had all the qualities that attract women. He was younger and handsomer than I. He talked well; he was full of enthusiasm and courage.

MARIO

It seems to give you great satisfaction to praise him now.

PAOLO

A great pity! If I had done as you wanted me to and burned those papers, and then some fine day

had found out about this affair, how could I ever have been sure —

MARIO

Certainty seems to make you suspicious!

PAOLO

What do you mean?

MARIO

This. If you had been suspicious a year ago, perhaps what has now happened might have been avoided. I did wrong not to open your eyes. If he had had a break with you, perhaps Luciano would never have killed himself.

PAOLO

But I should never have had this proof.

MARIO

Your peace of mind is dearly paid for — by others.

PAOLO

It 's no use for me to try to pretend that I feel at all sorry for Luciano.

MARIO

I 'm not speaking of him.

PAOLO

Of whom, then?

MARIO

Of your wife. Try to imagine how she must feel.

PAOLO

Do you think she blames herself — ?

MARIO

She can't do otherwise.

PAOLO

She seemed very much grieved, but not in any turmoil.

MARIO

You don't see what 's going on all the time. You only notice things when they're unexpectedly pushed under your nose. Besides, Anna has great control over herself.

PAOLO

And she has done her duty.

MARIO

She has been doing it for some time.

PAOLO

I 'll make her happy again; I 'll console her. — You 'll see, Mario. It seems as if I were back again in the first days of marriage — as if from today she were entirely mine.

MARIO

Leave it to time to console her. You 've read and found out, and that ought to be enough. There 's no need for Anna to know.

PAOLO

She was here an hour ago, when the town clerk brought me the pocketbook. But she went out immediately after.

MARIO

Then she does n't know that you 've read —

PAOLO

But she 'll probably infer that I have.

MARIO

Not necessarily. And in any case she 'll be grateful to you if you pretend not to know.

PAOLO

Oh, come now! Let 's not split hairs. Nothing could be flatter than to prepare a plan of conduct

in a case like this. What Anna did, she did for me. And it 's I who must think of making it up to her. She did it for me, for me, do you understand?

MARIO

Has anybody said that she did n't? Why should you fuss and fret so?

PAOLO

I 'm not fussing and fretting. Of course I shall not go up to her and say: " I 've read your letters and thank you so much." You understand that when I speak of making her happy and consoling her, I mean to do so by tenderness, by the most limitless confidence. I have always been like that. I was like that when she fell in love with me. There 's no reason why I should make myself over, even though I don't suit you.

MARIO

How you take it!

PAOLO

It 's you who take it ill. You have n't said a decent word to me. I expected something very different from you. Hearing you talk, one might think that this discovery was a disgrace. Has it done any harm beyond what had already been done? Luciano has been dead a month, and the first sorrow has already been softened down. And if I had remained ignorant about the whole thing, that would not have brought him back to life, would it? He did n't succeed in doing me the injury he intended. Peace to his ashes! I have the certainty of my wife's love; and, no matter how you may feel about it, that seems to me the best stroke of luck that could come my way.

MARIO

Come here. (*He puts his arm about Paolo's neck*) You know that I love you?

PAOLO

Yes.

MARIO

Well then, if you 're satisfied, I 'm satisfied. Does that suit you?

PAOLO

Yes. And now go and do your packing.

MARIO

Oh, by the way, I can't go tomorrow.

PAOLO

No?

MARIO

Falchi, the engineer, has just come. And the day after tomorrow the water company meets.

PAOLO

Oh, to the deuce with the water company!

MARIO

I can't get rid of it so easily; I 'm the president.

PAOLO

We had decided to go today, and we were staying over on your account alone.

MARIO

But what can I do? I had to sell the hay. And now it 's a question of three days, perhaps four.

PAOLO

Suppose Anna and I go in the meantime? We 've been paying rent for the chalet for the past fortnight. You can come as soon as you 're free.

MARIO

If you think —

PAOLO

I 'll tell you. The day after tomorrow is Anna's birthday. In the days when business kept me in Milan all through July, Anna and I always passed that day alone together. We did n't make any point of doing so, but it happened that way. Last year I was able to get away the first of July and we came here intending to stay until September. Well, three days before her birthday, Anna begged me to take her for a trip to Switzerland. She did n't tell me why, but she insisted that she wanted to go at once. We went to Interlaken and from there up as far as Murren. On her birthday we were in Murren. It was such a delightful spot, and Anna was so charmed with it that I engaged a chalet, then and there, for this year. A fortnight ago, you, who never before have been known to move, unexpectedly suggested going with us —

MARIO

Was it indiscreet of me?

PAOLO

Not at all. You could see for yourself that Anna was pleased. She 's very fond of you.

MARIO

Yes —

PAOLO

When you found that you would have to stay over, it was she herself who suggested that we wait for you. But that first delay would n't keep us from getting there in time; this second one would. And I myself, especially after this, am anxious to be there on a certain day. You 'll call it childish, I suppose —

MARIO

No. It 's all right. I 'll come after you.

PAOLO

We put off going until tomorrow on your account, but seeing that you don't intend to come right away, we might as well leave this evening. (*Changing his tone*) I feel like being off — getting away from here. Those letters —

MARIO

Burn them. Give them to me.

PAOLO

Oh no — not yet.

MARIO

Yes, go — go this evening. It 's better. But Anna will have to make good use of the time.

ANNA (*entering*)

Why shall I have to make good use of the time?

MARIO

I was just telling Paolo that I can't go tomorrow. I shall be kept here three or four days more. But there 's no reason why you two should stay here in the heat and wait for me. Paolo has to be in Milan the first of September; every delay shortens his holiday. I 'm old enough to travel alone, and as soon as I can get away, I 'll join you. What do you think?

ANNA

Do what suits you best.

MARIO

Besides that, I want to have the house and garden all cleaned up. You two would be in the way, but I 'm needed to oversee the thing.

PAOLO

And since Mario is going to stay, I told him that we 'd go this evening.

ANNA

So soon?

PAOLO

Your trunks are almost packed, are n't they?

MARIO

You 'll save a day. And at this time of the year it 's better to travel by night than by day. The St. Gotthard pass is wonderful by moonlight.

ANNA (*absent-mindedly*)

Yes —

MARIO (*to Paolo*)

Then you 'd better go right over to the livery stable in the square and tell them to send around a carriage. When does the train leave Poggio?

PAOLO

Twenty minutes past seven.

MARIO

Tell him to be here at six. I should send Battista to order it, but he had to go with the engineer. Besides, it 's better to see the carriage yourself; he has a number of antediluvian arks.

PAOLO

Why don't *you* go? You know him and his arsenal; you could make a better choice. Excuse me if —

MARIO

Perhaps you 're right. Anna, shall I send Maddalena to help you with your trunks?

ANNA

Yes, thank you, Mario. Send her, please.

MARIO (*going out*)

Then we 'll have dinner at five.

PAOLO

Yes.

[*Mario goes out. A pause follows. Anna takes a few steps toward the writing-desk. Paolo rushes up to her, takes her in his arms and kisses her*)

ANNA (*freeing herself violently*)

Oh, how horrible! (*The words "How horrible" slip involuntarily from her lips, rather breathed than said*)

PAOLO (*dismayed*)

Anna!

ANNA

Was there one of my letters in that pocketbook?

PAOLO

Yes — there was.

ANNA

Did you read it?

PAOLO

Yes.

ANNA

I killed a man — and you kissed me for it!

PAOLO

I did n't mean it. I had made up my mind not to tell you. Besides, Mario advised me not to. Then, when I looked at you — such a flood of tenderness came over me! But what was that word you said, Anna?

ANNA

Forgive me. And promise me that you 'll never speak about all this again — that you 'll never refer to it directly or indirectly — now or at any time in the future — never.

PAOLO

I promise.

ANNA

And see that you keep your promise.

PAOLO

Oh!

ANNA

See that you keep it. I know you. It 's terrible to think that you 've found out. As soon as I came in, I read in your eyes that you knew — I had hoped and prayed that you would never know. But as soon as I came in, I saw at once. (*With an imperceptible touch of mocking pity*) You had such a modest, embarrassed air. You see, I know you so well! Shall I tell you? When Mario suggested that you go to see about the carriage — I thought — he won't go. I had to smile when you sent him.

PAOLO

I noticed it — and wondered.

ANNA

Yes? Mario saw me smile too — and understood.

PAOLO

Please don't say so. It 's all right for you to understand *me.*

ANNA

In exchange, eh? And then, when Mario was going out, I thought too: now, as soon as we 're alone, he 'll come up and kiss me.

PAOLO

But you see —

ANNA

That, too, was natural, was n't it?

PAOLO

I love you so much, Anna! (*Long pause*) It 's strange how you seem to overawe me. I say something, and immediately I think: Ought I to have said it? Ought I to have kept quiet? It 's the first time that I 've ever had that sort of feeling about you. Both of us need a change.

ANNA

Yes. — But I don't want to go today.

PAOLO

No? But you just said —

ANNA

I 've thought better of it. There is n't even time to get ready.

PAOLO

But your trunks are already packed.

ANNA

Oh, there 's a lot of stuff to go into them yet.

PAOLO

We have a good eight hours.

ANNA

I 'm tired.

PAOLO

And Mario has gone to order the carriage.

ANNA

It will do just as well for another day.

PAOLO

Well, you 'll surely go tomorrow?

ANNA

Not today, at any rate.

PAOLO

I don't even know how to explain to Mario. It makes you seem so undependable.

ANNA

Oh, Mario will understand.

PAOLO

Better than I?

ANNA

I did n't mean —

PAOLO

Anna, you have n't forgiven me yet for reading those letters.

ANNA

There you are, referring to them already! — Oh, that 's all right, Paolo; it is n't that. I have nothing to forgive you. Believe me. There is n't a bit of anger or bitterness in me. I should have given anything in the world to keep you from knowing — for your own sake, for your good, for your peace of mind — not for myself. But yet I felt that sometime or other — (*Pause*) You 'll know some day that there has been an unnecessary tragedy.

PAOLO

What do you mean?

ANNA

I don't know. Don't pay any attention — forgive me. (*Is about to leave the room*)

PAOLO

Are you going?

ANNA

Yes.

PAOLO

Won't you even tell me whether or not you 'll go tomorrow?

ANNA

We have plenty of time to decide.

PAOLO

Oh, well then, there 's nothing more to say.

[*Anna goes out.*

PAOLO (*after a pause*)

An unnecessary tragedy! (*He sits with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands*)

MARIO (*entering*)

It 's all right. And how about Anna?

PAOLO

She 's just gone out.

MARIO

Maddalena will be here right away. She had gone to the wash-house. Here now, brother, get up and bestir yourself and get rid of this obsession. Of course, just at first — It 's best for you to go at once. The trip will brighten you up.

PAOLO

We 're not going.

MARIO

What?

PAOLO

Anna refused to go.

MARIO

Why?

PAOLO

How should I know?

MARIO

Did you tell her —

PAOLO

She understood, she asked me — I could n't deny it.

MARIO

Did she ask you right out of a clear sky, without your saying anything whatever about it?

PAOLO

For Heaven's sake, don't put me through a cross-examination now. If you only knew what ideas have been going through my head!

MARIO

Would you like me to speak to her? I think myself that it 's a very bad thing for you to stay here.

PAOLO

Do what you can. You understand her so well! She said as much herself.

MARIO

But you must promise me not to go puzzling your brains in the meantime.

PAOLO

What 's the use of my promising? I don't keep my promises. She said that too. She knows me. — You don't know me.

MARIO

Is she in her room?

PAOLO

I think so.

MARIO

And do try to forget about it.

PAOLO

Oh, wait! If — but no, go on, go on. — We 'll see later.

[*Mario goes out.*

PAOLO (*takes the letter from his pocketbook and reads very deliberately, accenting each word*) "You write me that if I do not reply, you will return at once." (*Speaking*) You write me! I wonder where that letter is? (*Reading*) "I love my husband. That is my answer, that, only that and always that. I

beg you not to torment me." (*Speaking*) I beg you not to torment me — Uhmm!

MADDALENA (*entering*)

Here I am.

PAOLO

You 're not needed — not for the present, at any rate. We 'll call you when we want you.

MADDALENA

Excuse me, sir; but is it true — what they 're saying around the town?

PAOLO

What?

MADDALENA

That the town clerk brought you Signor Luciano's pocketbook this morning, with a lot of money for the poor in it?

PAOLO

What a ridiculous idea?

MADDALENA

The town clerk's servant has just been saying so at the wash-house.

PAOLO

There was no money in the pocketbook. The town clerk himself knows that.

MADDALENA

It would n't have been surprising if there had been. Signor Luciano did n't visit us often, but when he did, he was a great spender.

PAOLO

I 'm glad to hear it.

MADDALENA

Just last year, Liberata, the miner's widow, who went to America to join her son — the one that you

gave fifty *lire* to. — Well, Signor Luciano gave her a hundred.

PAOLO

What a lot of idle talk! Why, he was n't even here.

MADDALENA

He was n't here? Why, I saw him myself —

PAOLO

Oh, for the Lord's sake — ! The woman got news that her husband had been killed in a mine, and that her son wanted her to go to America, the day before I left for Switzerland, a year ago yesterday or today. I remember it because I was able to give her that little money that I had collected for her in gold. She was to leave in two days —

MADDALENA

Yes.

PAOLO

What do you mean by "yes"? Luciano was n't here. I know he was n't.

MADDALENA

He came the day that Liberata left for America.

PAOLO

Oh! Two days after we left!

MADDALENA

Yes. He came in the morning.

PAOLO

Did he go to his own place?

MADDALENA

No, no, he came here. But he found nobody but your brother. The poor fellow was bored to death and went right away again.

PAOLO

Ah! I did n't know. — Then you 're right. — Oh,

he came? You 're right. Oh, he was generous! He left everything he had to the hospital.

MADDALENA

Yes, but he knew the hospital! —

MARIO (*calling from within*)

Maddalena!

MADDALENA

Here I am.

MARIO (*enters*)

My sister wants you.

[*Maddalena goes out.*

MARIO (*to Paolo*)

I 've managed to persuade her.

PAOLO

It 's a fine thing to have a good advocate!

MARIO

And, as you see, I did n't have to use much eloquence.

PAOLO

I bet I can guess how you did it.

MARIO

Oh, it was very simple. I —

PAOLO

No, let me say it. I should like to have my little triumph too. You gave up the business that was keeping you and decided to leave with us.

MARIO

Exactly.

PAOLO

Eh? Did n't I know? I was going to tell you before you went out, but then I thought I 'd wait and see. And when you made that suggestion, Anna suddenly agreed?

MARIO

Do you object.

PAOLO

Why, of course not. The more the merrier! Are we not going to have a good time? And for that purpose new places, travels, hotels and all that sort of thing are all right. But company is best of all! It 's only when you 're running away that you need to reduce your numbers.

MARIO

What 's that you 're saying?

PAOLO (*puts his hands on Mario's shoulders and looks him straight in the face*) It 's when you 're running away, you understand, that you need to reduce your numbers — when you 're running away — as Anna and I were doing last year.

MARIO

I don't understand what you mean.

PAOLO

You did n't even tell me that Luciano was here last year — nor when he was here.

MARIO

I don't know — I don't remember.

PAOLO

Oh, don't try to put me off with that! You knew, and you knew that Anna insisted on running away so as to avoid him. And I ran away with her, unsuspecting fool! A pretty figure I cut — the husband — taking the train to rush off — before the other one arrived!

MARIO

Well, suppose it to be true. It tells you neither more nor less than the letters.

PAOLO

No. A little more. Everything tells a little more. Put one little grain on top of another, and after a while you have a pile that can crush the life out of you. It tells a little more. It was one thing to keep him at a distance, and it was another to run away from him. You keep a troublesome person at a distance — without imploring him, however! But you run away because you 're afraid!

MARIO

Uh!

PAOLO

And look here, let's make a little investigation, so to speak. Let 's see. It 's improbable that he wrote her that he intended to come. Indeed, it 's certain that he did n't write her, because she would have answered: "You write me that you are coming. — I love my husband. — I implore you to stay where you are."

MARIO

Oh!

PAOLO

So it must have been she — who foresaw his intention. She felt him coming — by some divination —

MARIO

You 're the first husband to feel injured because his wife did her duty.

PAOLO

Uhmm — duty — dreary word!

MARIO

If there is a good woman in the world —

PAOLO

Woman —or wife?

MARIO

It 's the same thing.

PAOLO

Not at all! She 's a woman to everybody; she 's a wife to me alone. Do you think any man ever married a woman because she was good? Never in the world! I married because I loved and believed myself loved. There are thousands of good women. There is only one whom I love. There is only one who loves me — if that many!

MARIO

Paolo!

PAOLO

And if she loved him? Tell me, if she loved him and repulsed him on account of virtue and duty? Tell me. What sort of figure do I cut? If he were alive, we might have it out, and I might win. But he 's dead — he killed himself for love of her. If she loved him, there 's nothing in the world that can tear him out of her heart now.

MARIO

You think —

PAOLO

I don't know. And it 's just that! It 's not knowing. I want to know — I want her to tell me to my face. And she *shall* tell me! Oh, I had a premonition of this as soon as I read that first letter. I had no suspicions before, so I believed that " I love my husband." But I felt all at once as if I had been struck a blow that hurt — that hurt. And I could n't understand what it was. Oh, what a long time it takes for certain fears to take shape! At first they gnaw and gnaw — and you can't make out what they

are. I was happy; I told you I was happy; I wanted to convince myself of it. But you could see that fear was gnawing at me. And if she loved him? Oh! Her action was so much the more praiseworthy, was it? Everybody would praise her. Such a saint! I, too, would go down on my knees to praise her if she were somebody else's wife. But she 's mine! It 's not for me to be my wife's judge. I 'm too much an interested party to be a good judge. I 'm the owner — she 's mine — it 's my interests that are at stake! You 'll say I ought to admire her because when she could have taken everything, she took only a part. But I can see only what she has taken, not what is left.

MARIO

Brother, you must be crazy!

PAOLO

But can't you see that she abhors me?

MARIO

Oh, my God!

PAOLO

She abhors me! You were n't here a moment ago. Can't you see that she has to have you around to help her endure my presence?

MARIO

Today, perhaps — because she knows that you 've read. — Did n't I warn you? It 's terribly embarrassing for her.

PAOLO

No, it 's not only today. You 've never budged from this place — never. For the fifteen years that you 've been living this country life, you 've never been away from here for a week. And then a fort-

night ago you quite suddenly took it into your head to become a traveller. Did she ask you to?

MARIO

I solemnly swear —

PAOLO

I would n't believe anything you told me. Anna shall tell me herself.

MARIO

What are you going to do?

PAOLO (*about to leave the room*)

I 'm going to ask her.

MARIO

No, for Heaven's sake, Paolo!

PAOLO

Let me go.

MARIO

No, no! Maddalena is in there with her.

PAOLO

That 's easily remedied. (*Calls in a loud voice*) Anna!

MARIO

Oh, what an ungrateful wretch!

PAOLO

If she loved me, it was n't hard for her to reject him. — If she loved him, I don't owe her any gratitude.

ANNA (*entering*)

Did you call me?

PAOLO (*to Mario, who is about to leave the room*)

No, no — stay. Yes, Anna, I wanted to ask you one thing. Whatever your answer is, I 'll believe it.

ANNA

I 'm sure you will.

PAOLO

Was it you who asked Mario to come with us? I don't mean today.

ANNA

I never asked him — neither today nor at any other time.

MARIO

Now you see!

ANNA

I did n't ask him and I did n't suggest it to him. I feel forced to say, however, that if Mario had n't offered to come, I should n't have been willing to go either.

PAOLO

Today, of course. But how about a fortnight ago?

MARIO

Oh, can't you see how ridiculous it all is? I told you before —

ANNA

No, Mario, it is n't ridiculous. It 's quite natural that Paolo should want to know; and he has a right to question me.

PAOLO

I don't want to appear to be standing on my rights.

ANNA

You make a mistake in not doing so. We should stand upon our own — and respect those of others. A fortnight ago I should have gone with you alone.

MARIO

Oh, thank God!

PAOLO

Were you afraid — that she might say no?

ANNA

But when Mario suggested going with us — I was very glad.

PAOLO

That 's the same thing as saying that my company would have bored you.

ANNA

No, it would n't have bored me. But it would have been painful to me.

PAOLO

And may I ask why?

ANNA

Now that we have gone this far, you may. Because then you did n't know the reason of the tragedy that had occurred, but now you do know it. And now, when you know, you will understand that I must have been much afflicted. But for the sake of your peace of mind I had to hide my affliction from you; and I had a right to hide it, since I had nothing to reproach myself with toward you. You can't help realizing that it would be harder for me to hide my feelings if we two were alone together — every hour — every hour — ! While the presence of a third person —

MARIO

Now you see! Now you see!

ANNA

Then Mario had the happy thought of going with us.

PAOLO

Mario, who knew.

ANNA

I don't know whether or not Mario knew.

PAOLO

Did he never speak to you about it?

MARIO

Don't answer him, Anna, don't answer him. Come away. He 's ill — he 's not reasonable — poor fellow — it 'll pass off — and then he 'll understand —

ANNA

Oh no. It 's unnecessary —

PAOLO

An unnecessary tragedy, eh, Anna?

ANNA

Have you anything more to say to me?

PAOLO (*imperiously*)

Yes. I want to see the letters that Luciano wrote you.

ANNA

Of course! I 'll go and get them. (*She is about to go*)

PAOLO

Remember I want them all.

ANNA (*returning and handing him a key*)

They are in my desk, in the first drawer to the right. They are tied together with a black ribbon.

PAOLO

Very well. (*He goes out*)

MARIO

Forgive him, Anna; he does n't know what he 's doing. He loves you so much — and he 's so weak.

ANNA

Oh, he has no mercy!

MARIO

Like all weak people. But he loves you, he loves you.

ANNA

So much the worse. His love will be his ruin.

MARIO

No. It 's your place to help him.

ANNA

Perhaps — as long as I can do any good.

[*Paolo returns with the letters in his hand. He goes to the desk, takes up the others, throws them all into the fireplace and sets fire to them.*

MARIO

What are you doing? Anna — look!

ANNA (*stands motionless, watching the letters burn and murmuring in a low voice as if through a dream*) Gone! Gone! Gone! Gone!

[*Paolo goes up to Anna with his hands clasped in a frenzy of supplication. He bursts into tears and falls down on his knees before her. Mario goes out half touched and half disgusted.*

PAOLO (*still on his knees*)

And now — can you forgive me?

ANNA (*in an indulgent and hopeless voice, reluctantly placing her hand on his head*) Get up, get up.

PAOLO

Tell me you forgive me. I swear that I should be glad to die here and now.

ANNA

Yes, yes. But get up; don't stay in that position. It hurts me.

PAOLO (*rising*)

I don't know what it was that got into my head — but I 've suffered horribly.

ANNA

Yes, I can see that you have — yes — calm yourself.

PAOLO

Mario did n't — It was he who irritated me from the very beginning. (*Anna is about to leave the room*) Don't go away — stay here a moment. (*Anna sits down on the sofa*) You see that violent fit did n't last long. It was on account of Mario's being here. Mario is good and reasonable, but his presence irritated me. — Yes, yes, you were right. But you must also understand my state of mind. (*Rises and walks up and down*) When all is said and done, what does this outbreak mean? It means that I love you. — And it seems to me that 's the essential thing. One must look to the root of things. We 've been married for five years, and I ask you if I 've ever given you the slightest reason for complaint. I think not. And five years are five years. I have worked my way into a good position. You have always been able to go into society. I never cared much for amusements that are nothing but amusements. I used to have my bachelor friends, and my club — where other husbands go after they 've been married a year or so. I gave them all up. I don't want to make a virtue out of it, but —

ANNA

Please don't walk up and down so much.

PAOLO

Excuse me. Will you let me sit down here beside you? (*Long silence*) When shall I see you smile again, Anna? No, don't get up. Then you have n't forgiven me!

ANNA

What do you want, Paolo? What do you want me to do? Tell me quickly.

PAOLO

You made me promise never to say anything about —

ANNA

Yes, but I also told you that you would n't keep your promise. You 're making a mistake, however. Believe me. Don't ask me anything. When there is no more danger, I promise you — and *I* keep my promises — I promise you that I will tell you everything without your asking me. And it will be a good thing for both of us. But I want to be the one to decide when.

PAOLO

Very well, Anna, don't tell me anything. — But come away with me, with me alone. I 'll speak to Mario about it. He was only coming on your account, and he 'll be much more pleased to see us go away together as good friends. I understand that it 's painful to you to recall those memories. Very well, instead of reminding you of them, I 'll help you to forget them — I swear I will. I swear that I 'll never refer to them again. But come away with me, come with me, and you 'll see how much love —

ANNA

Don't insist on it, Paolo. If you insist I 'll go with you, but —

PAOLO

No, no, I don't insist. You see that I 'm begging for you; I don't want you by force. But think again, think again. I realize what you have done; and I 'll spend all the rest of my life in making up to you for it. I realize it. There is n't a saintlier woman in the world than you. But you ought to

try to put yourself in my place and have some pity for me too.

ANNA (*smiling bitterly*)

Ah!

PAOLO

Why do you want to keep up this torment? You said: when there is n't any more danger. What danger can there be? On whom does that danger depend — on you or on me? What is there about us that time can change? I have always loved you; I love you now; and at this moment I love you more than I have ever loved you before. — Give me your hand — just your hand. God, Anna, you 're so beautiful! And you 're mine — you 're my wife! And the vow that you plighted to me when you married me was not only a vow of fidelity but of love. Come away with me, come with me!

ANNA

No, no, no!

PAOLO

No? Are you afraid — that you 'll be unfaithful to him?

ANNA

Paolo! Paolo!

PAOLO

And suppose I insist upon it?

ANNA

You can't insist upon it.

PAOLO

But suppose I do?

ANNA

Paolo!

PAOLO

Suppose I command you?

ANNA

In one moment you would destroy all my work. But — your violence would set me free.

PAOLO

Go on and say it all.

ANNA

Is that what you want? Have we come to that? I 've done all I could — !

PAOLO

Yes, go ahead. Say it.

ANNA

I loved Luciano and I still love him.

PAOLO

Oh!

ANNA

I loved him, I loved him. — Do you hear? — And it gives me the most intense joy to tell you so. And you never saw that I was dying with the desire to scream out my secret! And when I watched you driving me to bay with your fierce curiosity, I said to myself: it 's coming, it 's coming! — It has come now. I loved him, I love him, and I have never loved anyone in the world but him! And I am suffering an agony of remorse for my virtue. Now you know.

PAOLO

Very well. (*Is about to leave the room*)

ANNA

Oh no. You must stay here now; it 's your turn to listen to me. You wanted me to speak. Now I 'm speaking. Now it 's I who will insist on being

heard. Of course, you realize that after a talk like this, it 's all over between you and me. So I must tell you everything. I listened to you, I will listen to you again if you want me to. But now you must listen to me. What have you ever done for me? What help have you ever given me? Did you see when you ought to have seen? Did you even suspect? No. A man had to die — and even that was n't enough! When you were not suffering as you suffer now, were you able to see that I was suffering? You thought my grief was for the death of one of your relatives! You could n't understand that the very soul was crushed out of me: you slept beside me those first nights and never noticed that I had to stuff the blankets into my mouth to keep from screaming aloud! Then all at once you found out the facts. And what were those facts? That I, your wife, through long years, in silence, had stood guard over your peace of mind and fulfilled what the world calls my duty. Then your curiosity was awakened, and to make up for lost time you tried to violate my soul, to pry into its innermost depths. Oh no, Paolo, no! That can't be done — neither by you nor by me. One must not try to know everything. And you can't walk into people's souls by the front door; you have to creep into them by stealth. You tried to force mine open. Very well, you 've had the satisfaction of seeing. There 's nothing more there for you.

PAOLO

No? You 're in the right, of course? — Well, you *are* in the right — even I recognize it. But then, I 've never had your love? You said so yourself.

I 've never had your love? Well, then? You 're in the right. But do you know what I 'll do? I 'll drive you out of my house.

ANNA (*joyously*)

Oh, I 'll go, I 'll go, I 'll go. And I 'll never come back! And you must n't make any demands on me, or ever come near me again. I have no more strength to keep me merciful. When I 've said good-bye I shall be dead as far as you are concerned!

[*She runs into her room. Paolo, motionless, thunderstruck, stands waiting. Anna returns with her hat and coat on and crosses the stage as if to go out.*

PAOLO

No, Anna, no, no, no! Anna, no! For pity's sake, wait! We 're both crazy! What would become of us? I need you! (*Approaching her*) Don't go. I don't want you to, you know I don't. I was crazy. Don't go. You 'll see — our whole lives — (*Anna tries to tear herself away*) No, for pity's sake! If you go — if you once get away — if you speak — I feel that it 's inexorable. Stay, stay, Anna!

ANNA (*freeing herself*)

Good-bye! (*She goes out*)

CURTAIN

Date Due

Demco 38-297

852.912 13489 Copy 1
G429
E
AUTHOR
Giacosa.
TITLE
The stronger.

852.912 13489 Copy 1
G429
E
Giacosa.
The stronger.

Library
Fergus Falls State Junior College
Fergus Falls, Minnesota

P6-BVI-006